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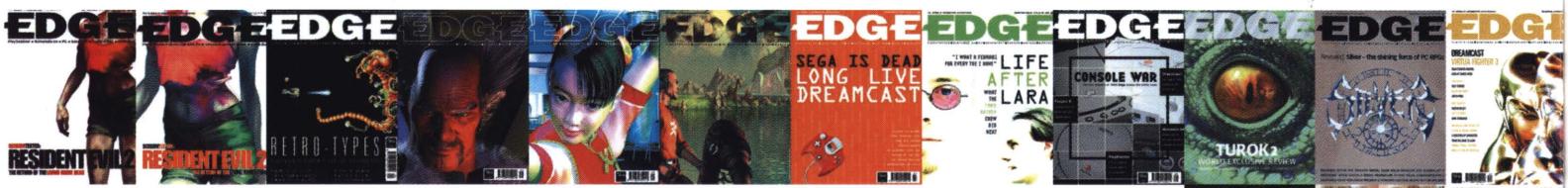
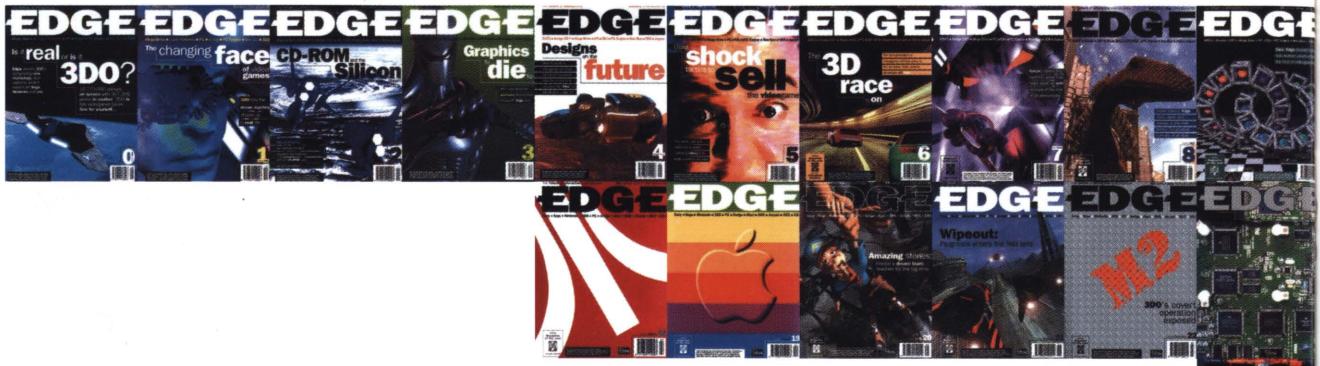
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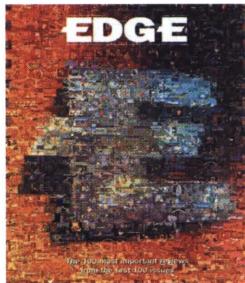
EDGE®

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**The 100 most significant reviews
from the first 100 issues**



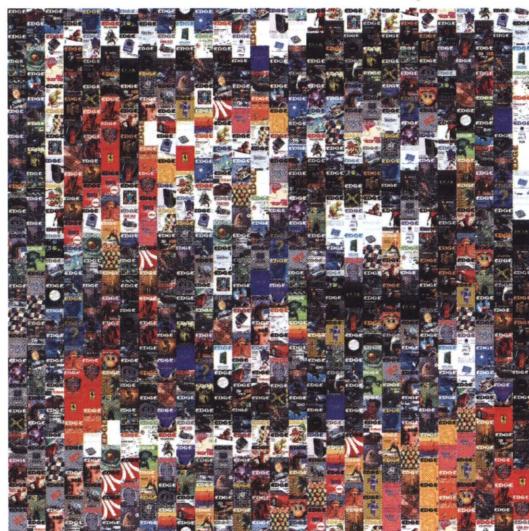


On the hundred from one hundred is the concept: the hundred most important reviews from the first hundred issues of **Edge**, recording both the magazine's history and the standout critical moments from the last eight years of videogaming. It's a chance to look back at more innocent times, sure, to a period when to be that good took Sega and 3DO stuck feathers in an issue to advertise its dodo. And also, importantly, an opportunity for **Edge** to reconsider era-defining games and its own critical comment, and to contextualise their impact on gaming culture.

Don't mistake this for **Edge**'s updated top 100, though. *GoldenEye*, *Gran Turismo* and *Super Mario 64* all make an appearance, but now they're flanked by *Rise Of The Robots*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Severance*, and more. All flawed, they were built up to be something they weren't by pre-release publicity. Previews provide hype that sometimes snowballs out of control. At review stage, though, it all melts away. One to ten: you're left with the game, and sometimes that's no more than average. Sometimes it's less. Four, then.

Harsh marking has been an **Edge** constant, but this issue also details the gradual shift in writing style and attitude that's washed, almost imperceptibly, over the course of **Edge**'s history. The magazine isn't the bastion of technical snobbery it was at launch; lauding technical achievements to the hilt is fine, but if it doesn't impact on the ingame experience it's substantially irrelevant. But the magazine does retain the passion and commitment towards gaming as an adult hobby and an artform.

And what better time to be proud of that? As gamers, we stand on the cusp of something new: at the edge of technology, at the most exhilarating time for videogame culture. The future is exciting. But that doesn't mean we should forget about the past.





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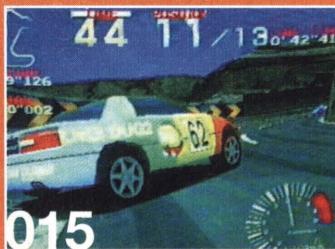
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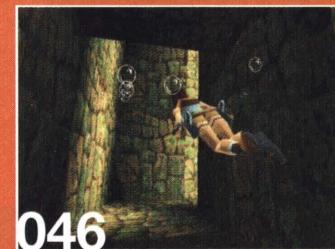
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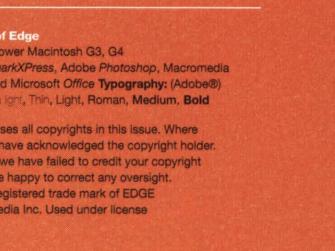
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directory special

the bye-centennial issue

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Production of Edge

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Street Fighter II Turbo

Format: SNES | Publisher: Capcom | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 1993



The majority of SF characters have had a minor makeover in terms of appearance and abilities, and they all move with an added injection of speed

The prayers of *Street Fighter II* devotees have at last been answered. The latest version of *Street Fighter II* contains both Championship gameplay and a Turbo edition with four speed settings plus six hidden ones, ranging from 'pretty quick' to 'ludicrously rapid'.

The Turbo game also contains the long-awaited new moves, such as Chun-Li's fireball and Ken and Ryu's mid-air hurricane kick, and it has also tweaked some of the old moves so that they are now longer and harder. In both versions there are new frames of animation, the backdrops have had a fresh coat of paint, and there's extra sampled speech – the game uses a massive 20 Megs, as opposed to 16 in the original *SFII*. Playability has also been improved, and all of the characters are now more evenly matched. But not all the changes here are for the better: the option and character screens aren't as slick, and the game doesn't look quite as polished.

However this is small potatoes compared to the improvements in the gameplay. You can see why Sega were less than happy to see a Turbo edition appear on the SNES before the Mega Drive has even a taste of the six-button beat 'em up. God knows what Capcom are doing to appease the Sega management; it's quite possible MD *SFII* will include all the versions so far and any new characters and backdrops. Until then, this is the ultimate beat 'em up; no other has the same characters or moves – or the sheer finger-aching, mind-numbing gameplay.

If you own SNES *SFII*, it's still a tricky decision whether you should buy *Turbo*: at current import prices, probably not. True, *SFII Turbo* hits the SNES with such force it almost breaks it. But the only smell of burning flesh is from greedy importers rubbing their hands

The only smell of burning flesh is from importers rubbing their hands at the prospect of charging ludicrous amounts of money (£90 on import)

at the prospect of charging ludicrous amounts of money (£90 on import) for what surely must be one of the games of the year. With all of the added features, the Champion Edition and the improved Turbo version, *SFII Turbo* is best simulation yet of the genteel art of street fighting.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Zangief enjoys the warming glow from Vega's flaming attack. Vega's not quite as powerful as he is in the previous version, but his flaming torpedo is still just about good enough to fry most opponents



Ken performs one of his Hurricane kicks on Chun-Li. The Hurricane kicks can now be performed at different heights, and Chun-Li boasts a new fireball attack – and not before time

The backdrops in *SFII Turbo* have been tweaked slightly over the original. Most of the settings feature subtle parallax scrolling to add a sense of depth and 3D to the otherwise flat, 2D gameplay

In retrospect



"The prayers of Street Fighter II devotees have been answered" Edge's review began. And they'd be answered time and time again, long after the prayers ended. The cumulative evolution eventually gave gamers Capcom vs SNK, and much Hadoken fun along the way, but none of the countless iterations – including the loved/loathed *Ex* series and the *Alpha* spin-off – have had the impact, both cultural and financial, of Capcom's fabulous, genre-defining sequel.

Gunstar Heroes

Format: Mega Drive | Publisher: Sega | Developer: Treasure | Origin: Japan | Date: 1993

Reviewed in E01



Gunstar Heroes supports a range of weaponry which can be combined to greater effect. This long-range flame thrower is one of the better ones

Treasure's *Gunstar Heroes* looks and plays like Konami's *Super Probotector* on the SNES. No surprise – Treasure's programming team is largely made up of ex-Konami coders. The athletic main character, the scrolling, the weapons, and the look of the Bosses all manage to give it that distinct *Super Probotector* feel. But this isn't a bad thing: *Super Probotector* was, and still is, a great shoot 'em up. Packed into an eight-Meg cartridge, *GunStar Heroes* features some of the fastest simultaneous two-player action you're ever likely to see on the Mega Drive. The graphics have a distinct cartoon feel to them, the backdrops are well detailed and the scrolling is very smooth.

Your character shifts at an incredible pace as he jumps, hangs, and climbs his way through each of the five futuristic levels, reaping death and havoc on just about anything that moves. You have the choice of four weapons: Lightning Fire, Force Fire, Chaser Fire and Fire Fire. Each weapon has its own strengths and weaknesses: Lightning Fire is great for long-range attacks but not so good for close-up action; Chaser Fire homes in on the enemy and is a good all-round choice. Force Fire sends out an unending stream of bullets, while Fire Fire is basically a flamethrower, designed for close-up mass destruction.

You can carry two weapons at a time, but they can be joined together to form a totally new weapon. For example, when Fire Fire is combined with Force Fire it creates a long-range flamethrower – ideal for killing just about anything and everything. Although five levels in the game doesn't sound like a lot, each level is huge – and just when you think you've seen off the last guardian, another one appears. It's quite demoralising: after using all your weapons and resources to finish off what you thought was the last Boss, you just get another one, bigger and meaner, to take its place. And then another, and another...

The action never lets up – not for a second – and by combining many mid-level Bosses with hordes of enemies, *Gunstar Heroes* quickly becomes an immensely hectic game. It looks good, it sounds good and it plays superbly. But after completing the game you get no great urge to return to it, even with two players. There are no hidden levels to find, no secret screens. In short, *Gunstar Heroes* is great while it lasts, but perhaps it doesn't last long enough.

In retrospect

It's almost certain that *Edge* was too harsh on *Gunstar Heroes*. The major reservation raised back in 1993, was that the game was too brief and featured little replay value. Countless eBay addicts, no doubt fuelled by Treasure's habit of releasing software in limited numbers, would beg to differ. As any auction winner will attest, the game still stands up aesthetically. More importantly, the combination of Japanese kitsch storyline and ostensibly simple but ultimately intricate play mechanics continue to reward repeated play.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten

Mortal Kombat

Format: SNES | Publisher: Acclaim | Developer: Probe | Origin: UK | Date: 1993

Reviewed in E01

Mortal Kombat's huge 16megabit cartridge is filled with backgrounds, digitised sprites, oriental tunes and samples familiar to fans of the coin-op. But the one feature that made it a hit in the arcades hasn't made the transfer: there's no mutilation, no blood and no external internal organs.

Apart from this, the home console versions are graphically spot-on – the sprites look good and the animation is excellent. Midway's arcade original gave you stylish ultraviolence and special death moves to 'finish' your opponent. Tired of fighting? – Then why not just tear off the other guy's head or rip his heart out? Explaining the changes made to the SNES version, Acclaim's European boss denied rumours that Nintendo disapproved of the violence, instead saying that the SNES version wouldn't be as violent as the Mega Drive due to 'restraints of hardware' – ie the SNES's state-of-the-art 16bit console couldn't do the gory graphics.

But does the cleaned-up *Mortal Kombat* look right? Unfortunately, the lack of blood 'n' guts goes a long way in reducing what gave the game its weird appeal in the first place. Without the gory punchline, this joke just isn't funny.



Edge rating:

Six out of ten



Sub-Zero reels back after a severe punch to the head, splashing, er, grey stuff everywhere. Nintendo's sanitisation of the game is ridiculous, especially in the face of the blood-splattered Mega Drive version



In retrospect

Building a name for itself on hype, outrage, and ultra-violent special moves, *Mortal Kombat* wasn't really much better than its ancestor, the atrocious *Pit Fighter*. Play mechanics and collision detection were brutal and ineffective, but that seemed a little superfluous: *Kombat* had gore. Or rather the arcade version did; this, the SNES version, had all the blood removed and left players wondering what the point was. It certainly wasn't the future, anyway. Digitised sprites would soon disappear in favour of polygons, although that wouldn't stop *Kombat*, the franchise still echoing across modern-day formats.

FIFA International Soccer

Format: Mega Drive | Publisher: EA | Developer: Extended Play Productions | Origin: US | Date: 1993

Reviewed in E03



FIFA International Soccer represents the first assault on *Sensible Soccer*'s crown. Whether the close-up isometric viewpoint appeals as much as the expansive, top-down view of *Sensi* remains to be seen



In retrospect

The arrival of EA's first *FIFA* outing marked an important point in football videogaming: the shift from *Sensible*'s 2D pinball purity into something closer to approximating the sport itself. Edge's review welcomed the isometric competitor into the arena, and so did the general public, consuming the game – and each subsequent iteration – in obscene amounts. It appeared to be a move towards simulation, belying *FIFA*'s modern-day arcade status, but eight years of evolutionary sloth have blighted the series' reputation and critical attention has since over shifted to Konami's superior *Pro Evolution Soccer*.

Rather than go for the super-slick perfection of *Sensible Soccer*, EA has gone for a slower-paced, graphically superior game that relies on atmosphere rather than ultra-fast dynamics. Whereas *Sensible Soccer* brings on an adrenaline rush through pure speed and head-to-head competitiveness, *FIFA* gives you the feeling of being there by setting the scene, with all the sights and sounds of the real game.

For a start, when you play this game, you must link it up to an amp to benefit from the superb sounds. The crowd chants as the game plays and, more impressively, adjusts to what's happening onscreen.

As for the visuals, while the isometric 3D view leads to a slower game, it also enables more player detail and animations, with the usual mix of headers and overhead kicks, as well as some new ones like the back-heel. The controls are all very friendly and even placing a ball from a goal kick or throw is done effortlessly using a controllable crosshair. Add to this the seemingly endless list of play options and features not normally seen in footy games, like the adjustable Defence, Midfield and Attack, and you've got an incredibly realistic soccer experience on your hands.



Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Secret Of Mana

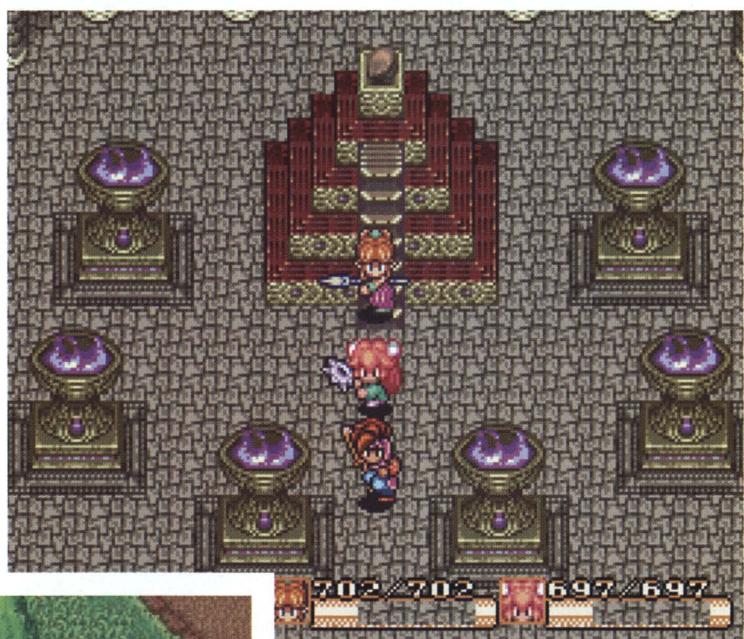
Format: SNES Publisher: SquareSoft Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1994

Reviewed in E04



In retrospect

It's safe to say Square doesn't make them like this any more. The original review's claim that *Mana* betters *A Link to the Past* may be a little on the contentious side, but its overall assessment of the former as "an unmissable experience" remains true to this day – very little, if anything, has been lost during the eight years since. Sadly, *Legend of Mana* (above) only served to reinforce the magnificence of the first western *Mana* game (*Secret of Mana* is known in Japan as *Seiken Densetsu 2*, while *Legend* is SD4 – SD3 only formed part of the stock of the most determined of importers).



The gameworld is so vast that airborne travel is one of the fastest ways to get around. Initially, you can pay someone to fire you from a cannon, though later in the game you get to ride about the Mode 7 landscape on dragon (top right)

The game begins in earnest when the sprite and girl characters have been found and recruited on the quest. With the aid of the Super Multitap, threeplayer games are superb

On the face of things, *Secret Of Mana* probably won't do as well as it deserves to, which is a shame because it's such a well-crafted piece of software. At a cursory glance, *Secret Of Mana* looks like an average Japanese RPG with a pre-set storyline and translated text. That is, your time is either spent wandering around the place killing things or talking to small, cute characters. But within this well-worn framework *Mana* includes some of the best game design and features ever seen: simultaneous threeplayer action, a cracking combat system, superb controls, and yes, some of the most engrossing and rewarding gameplay yet. It really is in a class of its own as far as action RPGs or adventures are concerned.

And that's the point to stress here. It's essentially an adventure – all the traditional RPG elements are included – there are 64 different types of weapons, 58 types of armour, 27 spells, and all this detail is handled by a superbly designed player interface. Selection rings rotate around the player and don't obscure the action onscreen, while the ability to select something and then give it to one of your companions is simplicity itself.

And as if all that wasn't enough, *Secret Of Mana* looks great too. For a start it's great to see that the Americans have kept the brilliant Japanese artwork in the packaging – usually the first thing to go. And the game graphics are unique and appealing, reflecting the artist's surreal vision of the game perfectly. Some of the nicer graphic elements are saved until much later in the game, though. What can't be conveyed here are the beautiful sounds in *Secret Of Mana*. The wide range of folky, ethereal soundtracks really create a wonderful atmosphere, even if a few of the tunes get a little irritating at times.

Of course, the sheer size of *Secret Of Mana* is staggering. It's estimated that the average player will take around 70 hours to complete it. And that for that reason alone, it's a serious gameplay proposition, offering great value. The fact that it's also an immensely entertaining game makes it an unmissable experience.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Frontier: Elite II

Format: PC/Amiga ■ Publisher: Gametek ■ Developer: David Braben ■ Origin: UK ■ Date: 1994

Reviewed in E04

You'll hate this game for at least two hours. Granted, you'll spend those hours banging your head against its frontend and griping about its graphics, only to find that the quality of the game underneath has possessed you while you were moaning about its presentation, and you'll end up loving it to bits. But the memory of that initial hatred never quite goes away, and sours what could have been a perfect relationship. Perhaps it's true that you can only fall in love once, because this space sequel simply lacks the thrill of its grandparent. In essence, it's lost the must-play impact that put *Elite* way ahead of the competition, even before you got into it and realised how deep and involving it was. So many quality games have come and gone in the intervening nine years that *Frontier: Elite II* just doesn't seem to be pushing back any boundaries, as its name would seem to imply.

Why? Well, the 3D graphics simply aren't up to scratch, ranging from being a bit crude and jerky on the PC to being virtually unplayable crude and jerky on an Amiga. This is an immediate problem because it makes combat extremely difficult, as it's next to impossible to tell where a fast-moving spaceship is going to be the next time the screen updates. You can learn to deal with it, but it doesn't stop the whole experience of cruising the space highways being slightly frustrating and tiresome, rather than – as it was in *Elite* – utterly exhilarating.

This is all water off a duck's back, though, to a game as impassively vast as *Frontier*, and if you are willing to take the time to get used to its peculiarities, you'll find yourself immersed in a whole new world of adventures, dazzling in scope and hopelessly addictive. On one floppy disk you have, quite simply, an entire universe to explore. Trader? Pirate? Miner? Mercenary? Explorer? Taxi Driver? There is no set goal; it's entirely up to you in which directions you channel your energies. If you want to live in another world, you'll find it here, and *Frontier* may well be the best game you've ever played. However, if you're just looking for something to pass the time with, you won't find any cheap thrills. Get hooked and you are hooked for good. But there's more attractive bait around.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten



The Bulletin Board (above) posts details of missions or tasks you can choose to accept, usually for a large payment

In retrospect

It was one of the most anticipated games ever, but failed to deliver in key areas. First, it was buggy. Second, the combat lacked finesse. Yet the loving detail which Braben and his team injected into this game shined through and redeemed the experience. The galaxies were vast, the missions varied and the open-ended structure worked just as potently as in the original. Due to publisher support (or lack of it) *Elite III* was released with barely a whimper, but in 2002 Frontier Developments is determined to deliver the greatest space game ever devised: *Elite 4*.

Frontier contains a mind-boggling 100,000,000,000 stars, many mapped from existing astronomical data, the rest statistically extrapolated. Of course, size – or in this case – quantity, isn't everything...

Myst

Format: Mac ■ Publisher: Broderbund ■ Developer: Cyan ■ Origin: US ■ Date: 1994

Reviewed in E04



In retrospect

Nice graphics, shame about the interface. *Edge* was perhaps a touch generous to a title which was little more than a glorified Grattan's catalogue full of sci-fi landscapes and architecture. But it still went on to sell in staggering numbers and remains one of the most profitable videogames of all time. *The 7th Guest* (pictured above) came soon after and offered similarly hollow gameplay interspersed with 'moodily' video footage. Unremittingly tedious.



Written entirely in Hypercard (a multimedia authoring system), *Myst*'s game engine is basically an interactive database. As such, it's little more than a point 'n' click puzzler, grandly embellished

It's been a while since we've seen games using their all-out weirdness as their unique selling point. But here's a game proclaiming itself as the 'surrealistic adventure that will become your world.'

In *Myst*, you've fallen into a bizarre world contained within the pages of a book, and you get to point-and-click your way around a large number of gorgeously ray-traced locations, starting off on an island that looks like a set for a '90s remake of 'The Prisoner'. There's the traditional selection of objects to click on, and some reasonably pleasant animations – when you find an object that actually does something.

The obvious criticism to be made is that the game engine isn't anywhere near as sophisticated as the beautifully rendered in-game graphics. Coming from the people responsible for the influential Macintosh graphic adventure *Cosmic Osmo*, *Myst* still has that 'wander-around-admiring-the-pictures-and-clicking-on-things' feel, with none of the zany character interaction that makes games like *Monkey Island* such fun.

But if you prefer *Dark Seed* over, say, the LucasArts games, you could easily spend hours in *Myst* just checking out the nice scenery.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten



Voyeur

Format: CD-i ■ Publisher: Philips ■ Developer: Philips POV ■ Origin: US ■ Date: 1994

Reviewed in E06

The bluescreen technique that *Voyeur* uses to incorporate footage of actors and props into computer-generated backgrounds is startling at first. The prerendered graphics are varied and realistic, the music is atmospheric and at the same time doesn't intrude on the digital action. Even the acting is fairly unembarrassing.

Billed as the 'first real interactive movie', *Voyeur* casts you as a nosy neighbour of the Hawke family. Your video camera is constantly trained on the windows of Hawke Manor, and it's your task to expose Hawke Senior for the nasty fellow that he is, by videotaping key conversations and items of evidence. The problem is one of interactivity. Moving your camera from room to room in an effort to catch the significant moments is intriguing enough the first few times, but the conversations remain exactly the same on each play.

Since your position is never more than that of observer, there's no real way to influence the action, and therefore no proper sense of interactivity. Whilst enjoyable for a while, and laudable in its aspirations, *Voyeur* is ultimately an extremely shallow and rather disappointing experience.



Edge rating:

Five out of ten



In retrospect

If ever a gaming trend could be described as blissfully short-lived it was this one. Other words that could be used to describe the interactive movie: ill-conceived, badly acted, poorly produced, inanely repetitive, and unforgivably tedious. *Voyeur* was no different; in fact, issue six saw three games of its ilk reviewed, the other two being the equally risible *Night Trap* and *Ground Zero Texas*. All scored five, somewhat

contradicting the issue's main feature that proclaimed the future of games as FMV.



The 'adult' content of the disc – that resulted in it receiving an 18 certificate – is frankly a bit tame. About as explicit as a raunchy episode of 'Brookside', it all becomes monotonous after a while.

SEGA

The epic adventure continues

AM2
SOFTWARE R&D DEPT.2



Dreamcast

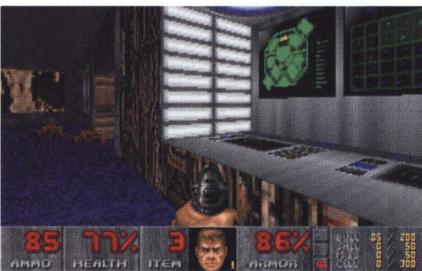
Doom: Evil Unleashed

Format: PC ■ Publisher: id Software ■ Developer: In-house ■ Origin: US ■ Date: 1994

Reviewed in E07



Doom's outdoor locations – replete with moody, cloud-filled skies – make a real change from the relentless, claustrophobic corridors of Wolfenstein 3D



In retrospect

There are some who still haven't forgiven Edge for giving id's groundbreaking FPS Seven out of ten. More still, who haven't forgiven the reviewer's main criticism that the creatures can not engage the player in discourse (though, to be fair, the forming of alliances is still a potent notion). On reflection it was a harsh assessment of a game which made PC gamers quiver at the knees and endured for so long. The familiar format has recently been resurrected for GBA and remains an enjoyable splatter-fest.



Although Wolfenstein 3D kick-started the FPS movement, Doom adds immeasurably to the genre. The use of immersive stereo sound and interactive lighting makes playing certain levels downright unsettling. Hidden passageways, secret rooms and a range of difficulty levels aids repeat play

I t's got to go down as a marketing coup: by releasing the first episode of its new 3D-perspective maze adventure/shoot 'em up as shareware, id Software managed to whip up a vast torrent of nigh-frantic bulletin board trading. Well, you write a game as immediately playable as *Doom* and ship it with the message 'please distribute like crazy' and you're guaranteed a big audience.

The differences between *Doom* and the now primitive *Wolfenstein 3D* are obvious at first glance. Firstly, id has got a lot better at clipping sprites in three axes – which means simply that the action in *Doom* happens on more than one level. There are stairs for you to climb, lifts to find, and aliens firing at you from windows and balconies high above the ground. This adds major new depth to the action – go back and play *Wolfenstein* and you'll laugh at the horrible 2Dness of the 3D perspective. It makes games like 3DO's *Monster Manor* look totally passé before they're even out in the shops.

That said though, there are problems with the game. Yes it is good – in fact, it's a very, very technically impressive piece of programming. But where's the genuine 3D look up/down of *Ultima Underworld*? Where's the variety in the gameplay (it's all just kill, kill)? And, looking at it coldly, what is there really in *Doom* to set it above the most average, most highly repetitive 2D shoot 'em up? *Doom* makes serious advances in what people will expect of 3D games in the future. But the gameplay is as narrow as it gets; you run along beautifully drawn corridors and through stunning rooms shooting at an almost endless supply of enemies.

On the plus side, some of the lighting effects in the game are truly scary. Walking through the computer centre with the lights flashing slowly and rhythmically, then turning to find one of those hideous pink beasts running behind you, is a seriously intense videogaming experience.

It's just a shame that the number of enemies is fairly limited. After a while, the multiple pump-action, blood-spraying demise of yet another monster is only marginally satisfying. As it is, once the power of *Doom*'s graphics has worn off (they're amazing so give it a week or two), you'll be longing for something new. If only you could talk to these creatures, then perhaps you could try and make friends with them, form alliances. Now that would be interesting.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Ridge Racer

Format: Coin-op Publisher: Namco Publisher: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1994

Reviewed in E07

State-of-the-art racing games are definitely flavour of the moment in the arcades. With *Ridge Racer* now a major attraction throughout the country, it seems only appropriate to give a more in-depth appraisal of what is arguably the best-looking videogame yet created, and the one most qualified to give people a taste of the future.

After stealing the show at the 50th Amusement Trade Exhibition International in London, *Ridge Racer*'s success seems assured. Especially if some machines' weekend takings of £1,500 are anything to go by. But some people still have their doubts. Is Namco's new baby the game to give *Virtua Racing* a run for its money?

Well, if it's graphics we're talking about, there's no competition. *Virtua Racing* certainly oozes class, and of course has those incredible camera angles. But the sheer quality of *Ridge Racer*'s texture-mapped images has the contest sewn up – 400 million floating-point operations per second, if anyone is interested in the maths involved, and there are enough polygons generated here at 60fps to give a Silicon Graphics rep a heart attack.

But the most impressive thing about *Ridge Racer* is the thoroughly realistic way the cars look and handle. When you approach them on the track, they don't get all blocky as you'd expect them to: they shine like real cars, lean around corners like real cars, and are packed with detail and sculpted with loving curves. If it wasn't for the sheer pace of the game, you could happily just drive along and admire the other road users.

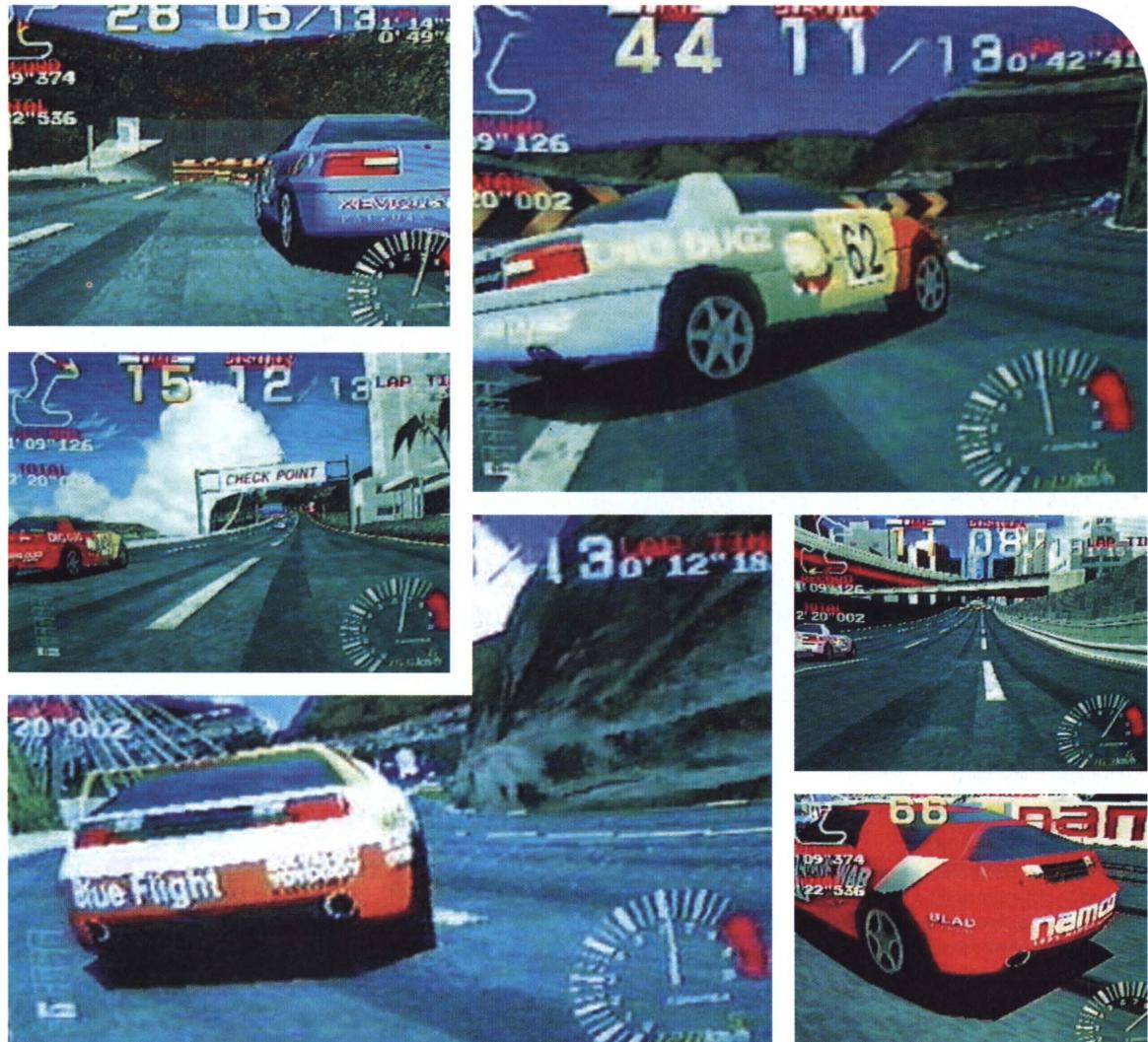
And that's the main difference between *Ridge Racer* and *Virtua Racing*. While every attempt has been made to make *Ridge Racer* a competitive racing game, it's also very much the coin-op equivalent of taking the car out for a leisurely spin on a Sunday morning. But that's not to say it's dull. Far from it.

However, the inclusion of only one main track also rather scuppers the game's longterm appeal as an *OutRun*-style discovery trip. And when it comes down to it, the lack of a link-up facility and limited amount of tracks keeps *Ridge Racer* tucked away in the slipstream of Sega's unassailable classic. But if *Virtua Racing* remains the current champion on the racetrack, *Ridge Racer* stakes its claim as king of the open road.



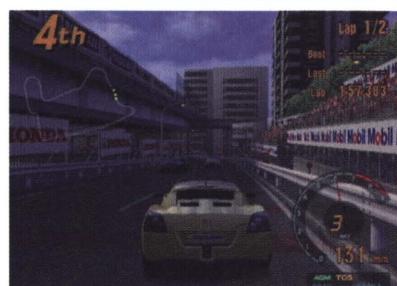
Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



Namco has really raised the bar for coin-op graphics with this stunning road racer. The amount of detail in the scenery and on the curvaceous cars leaves all other racing coin-ops in the shade

In retrospect



It's a car on a road, it moves left and right, occasionally overtakes another vehicle and goes around the same circuit time after time. What was all the fuss about? But *Ridge Racer* did revolutionise the driving game and for the first time since the release of *OutRun* offered something to gawp at with incredulity. This glowing review of the arcade version was superseded by Edge's oranistic appreciation of the PlayStation version (9/10, E17). Like a treasured teddy bear it is fondly remembered but has since had the stuffing ripped out of it by the *Gran Turismo* series (left).



Although the twisting track takes in tunnels, bridges, mountainside passes and a cityscape, the lack of other, disparate tracks is the game's main downfall

Super Puyo Puyo

Format: SNES Publisher: Banpresto Developer: Compile Origin: Japan Date: 1994

Reviewed in E07



In retrospect

The beauty of *Tetris* comes with instant understanding and bare simplicity. *Puyo Puyo* takes a little longer to grasp, but proves a deeper game, and one that's just as addictive. Indeed, if the subsequent Neo Geo Pocket version had become as synonymous with the handheld as *Tetris* was with the Game Boy, SNK's fate could have been so different. A more complex game than cursory investigation reveals, *Puyo Puyo*'s dynamic deserves better than to be dismissed as "dependent to a large extent on luck", a flippant caption to its plotted brilliance.



Puyo Puyo isn't quite the blatant *Tetris* rip-off that initial impressions suggest. In fact, it shares more similarities with Sega's *Columns*, with success dependent to large extent on luck

Puyo Puyo is a *Tetris* clone that was released on the Mega Drive back in December 1992. Unlike *Tetris*, in *Puyo Puyo* (the 'Super' is the usual token addition) you control falling pairs of coloured blobs. By rotating them, it's possible to link up groups of the same colour. If four or more cling together, they disappear, letting whatever was resting on top of them fall down into the newly vacated slots.

As you'd probably expect, *Super Puyo Puyo* scores most points in twoplayer mode. When a player manages to drop several groups of blobs, a counter shower of clear blobs rains down on the other player, thwarting any blob-dropping plans they might have had. This still happens in oneplayer mode, but things don't ever get quite so enjoyable. It's a fact of gaming life – two players will always have more fun than one.

It's rather difficult to determine the value of a game like *Super Puyo Puyo* when there are a million *Tetris* clones already out there, and when this sort of thing fits so cosily into the shareware or public domain category that the Amiga and the PC enjoy. Consider this: for less cash than *Super Puyo Puyo* costs you could pick up a Game Boy and a copy of *Tetris*.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Virtua Racing

Format: Mega Drive Publisher: Sega Developer: AM2 Origin: Japan Date: 1994

Reviewed in E08

Let's get one thing straight: this is not a perfect version of the arcade *Virtua Racing* squashed down into a Mega Drive cart. It is, however, a decent conversion – given the Mega Drive's limitations – of one of the best arcade racers ever made.

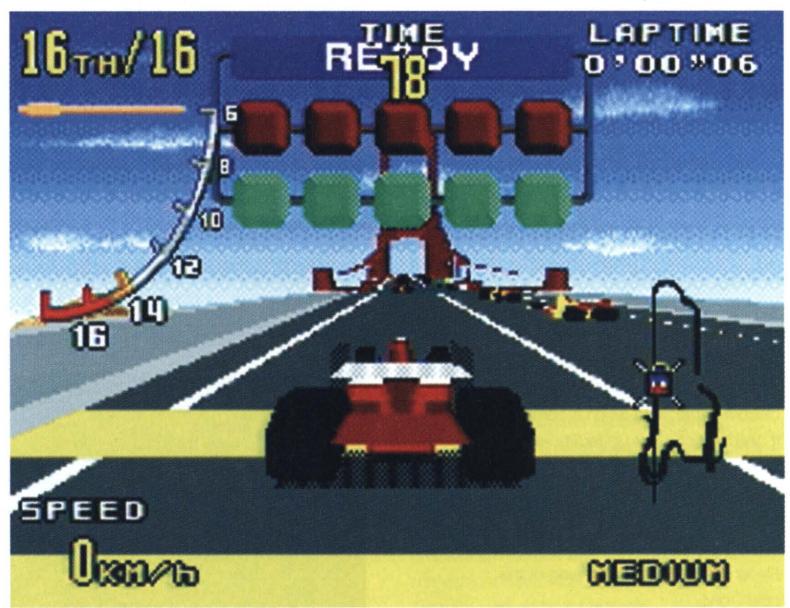
All the arcade features are here: the three courses, the pitstops, and even the four selectable viewpoints. But the Mega Drive version also throws in a few extra attractions, including a hidden 'mirror track' feature; a handicap option; a replay feature; and the ability to choose the number of laps raced. There's also a split screen twoplayer mode (in truth, this game's saviour), which offers the same excitement and longterm appeal as the coin-op.

It has to be said, the oneplayer mode is disappointing. It fails to deliver a rush of adrenaline in the same way the coin-op did. But the SVP (Sega Virtual Processor) chip included in the cartridge has certainly helped to produce a great-looking game. Fans of the arcade game will undoubtedly love it, while others will just be impressed by what the Mega Drive can do. Either way, Sega has made a bold attempt to bring home the arcade experience.



In retrospect

It's not difficult to remember why *Virtua Racing* made such an impact back in the early '90s. Effectively it transformed the *Super Sprint*-dominated racing genre to a colourful polygonal universe. Delightful touches such as sparks flying and pitstops, made it a worldwide success. Though the arcade original still retains some charm and playability, the inferior Mega Drive and Saturn versions (among others) are absolutely dire. Not even scarlet-tinted spectacles could hide the dreariness of these conversions. Proving that retro gaming can sometimes be a painful hobby.



Edge rating: Eight out of ten

The smooth, fluid 3D geometry of the coin-op is replicated as well as the Mega Drive can manage (with the added assistance of some on-cart chipper). After all, the coin-op does cost £14,000...

Super Metroid

Format: SNES Publisher: Nintendo Publisher: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1995

Reviewed in E09

The original *Metroid* on the NES was a platform shoot 'em up which is nowadays regarded as something of a classic. This SNES sequel may well acquire similar reputation in years to come, but describing it as a platform shoot 'em up doesn't do it justice; 'futuristic-side-on-scrolling adventure with *Zelda*-esque overtones' is a more accurate description.

The plot is predictably ludicrous. It's essentially the same as that of the NES game: all you have to do is explore the usual platform maze, kill a few aliens and collect weapons and power-ups. Your objective, of course, is to find the killer larva and destroy it. But although *Super Metroid* looks derivative to the disinterested observer, when you take hold of a control pad yourself and spend some time with the game, you begin to realise just how intensely playable it is.

In true Nintendo fashion, *Super Metroid* starts very slowly. At first, your character only has a basic weapon and you haven't got a clue what you should be doing or what route you should be taking. But the game is structured so that initially you can only follow certain paths, and these paths channel you towards weapons and other helpful items that then allow you access to other parts of the game. In no time at all you realise that you've got a sprawling game on your hands, with a huge play area to explore.

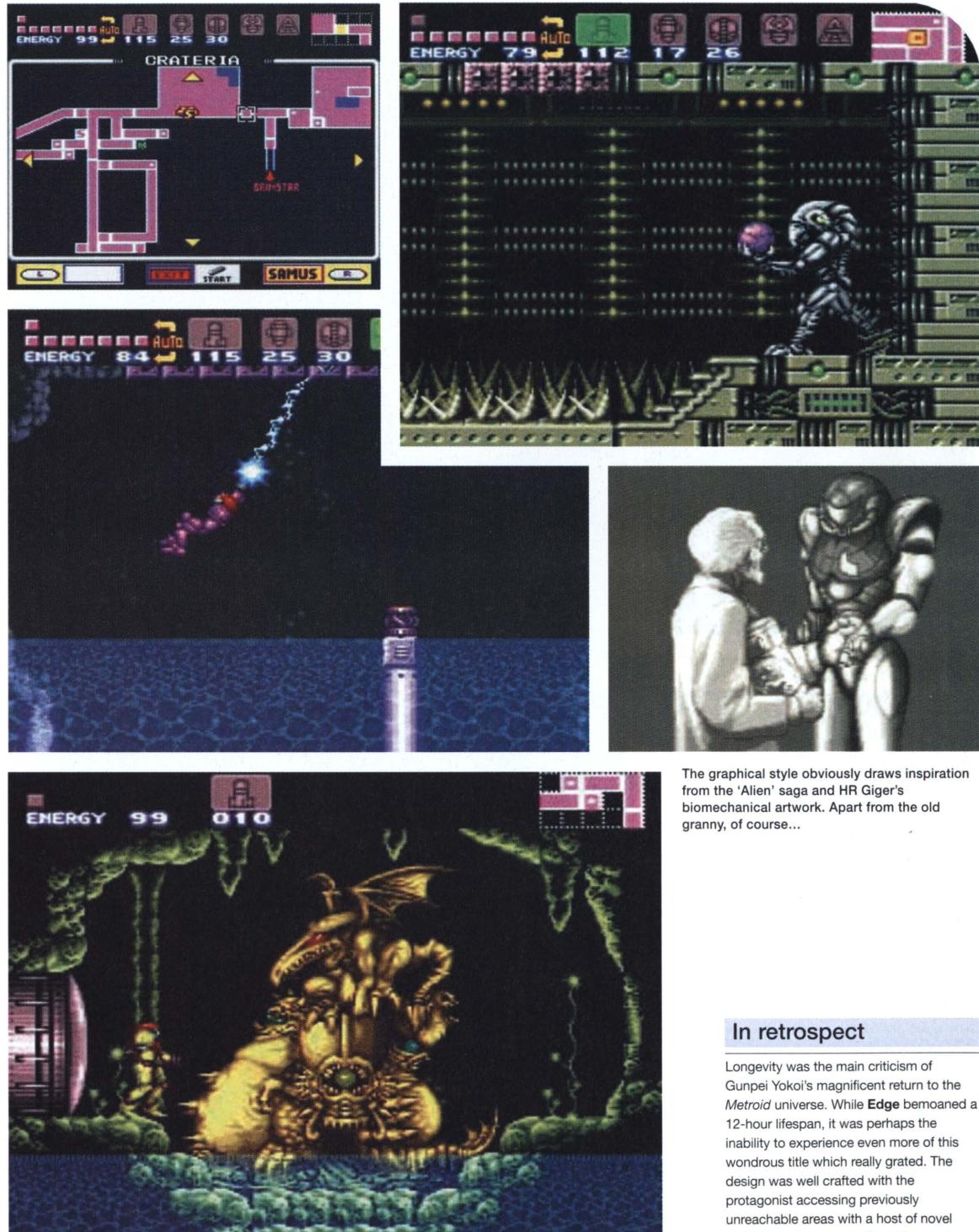
Despite the game's size, a moderately resolute player will be able to finish *Super Metroid* in around 12 hours' game time. The cartridge may be one of the biggest ever on the SNES, but your premature arrival at the game's conclusion makes you wonder where all those megabits went. Precious few of them were spent on the graphics, because *Super Metroid* is a long way from being the most aesthetically pleasing SNES games. The sound is a little more stimulating, with some superb orchestrated tunes, but they do have a tendency to drone on after a while.

Super Metroid will take your emotions on a roller coaster ride of joy and pain: one moment you'll be throwing your head back in sheer ecstasy after defeating a boss in a battle of heroic proportions; the next minute you'll find yourself furiously stabbing the reset button in complete frustration. Those who enjoyed the first game will therefore have no complaints about the action, but many people will find the SNES title's distinct lack of longevity a bit of a letdown.



Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



The graphical style obviously draws inspiration from the 'Alien' saga and HR Giger's biomechanical artwork. Apart from the old granny, of course...

In retrospect

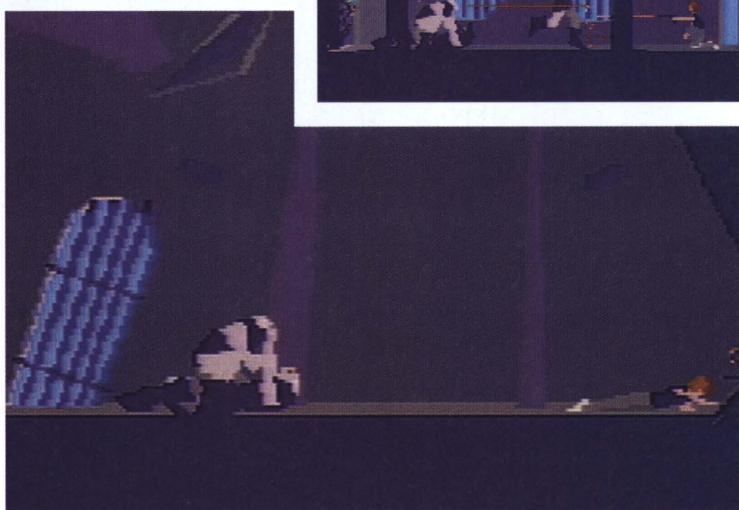
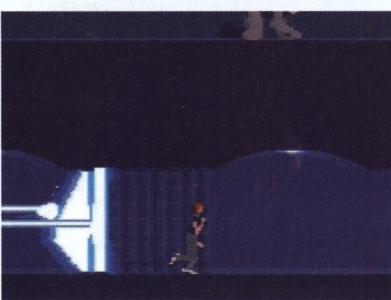
Longevity was the main criticism of Gunpei Yokoi's magnificent return to the *Metroid* universe. While **Edge** bemoaned a 12-hour lifespan, it was perhaps the inability to experience even more of this wondrous title which really grated. The design was well crafted with the protagonist accessing previously unreachable areas with a host of novel gadgets and weapons. Could be used as a lesson on how to construct an atmospheric experience for most game designers.

The continuing saga of Samus Aran and her battle against the Metroids and Mother Brain. The curvaceous bounty hunter's exploits follow on from the original NES title and its Game Boy sequel

Out Of This World

Format: 3DO Publisher: Interplay Developer: Delphine Origin: France Date: 1994

Reviewed in E11



In retrospect

Out Of This World captivated audiences with its splendid marriage of cut-scenes and dramatic 2D action. By today's standards the gameplay is over-reliant on quick reflexes and memory test gaming but back in 1991 (Amiga version) Delphine delivered tremendously absorbing moments which could truly be called 'cinematic'. A sequel soon followed in the shape of *Flashback*, which paved the way for *Fade To Black* on PlayStation (above). Though garnering half-decent reviews, the series had lost all its charm with the transition to 3D.

Out Of This World features heavily stylised cartoon backdrops and 2D polygonal characters. The animation was quite superlative for its time, though the 3DO outing adds little new

When *Out Of This World* was originally released on the Amiga in 1991, it caused an absolute sensation. French development team Delphine Software had taken a simple side-on, flip-screen platform adventure, introduced revolutionary polygon animation, cinematic cut-scenes and intricate puzzles, and produced the most advanced platformer of its time. But all this excitement was generated three years ago. In the meantime *Out Of This World* has turned up on a wide variety of formats, and its appearance on the 3DO is unlikely to have the same impact as the original.

The plot of this 3DO game is the same as the original: after a scientific experiment goes wrong, you find yourself stranded on an alien planet, from which you have to find your way home. *Out Of This World*'s story was never its strong point, merely a prop to hang its jump-jump gameplay on. But what made up for its sketchy scenario was its superb playability, and in this respect too, the 3DO version of *Out Of This World* is no different to its predecessors.

Although the game employs the now familiar 'trial and error' arcade puzzle system, a lot of skill is required to get through it. In fact, your progress is likely to be hindered by a lack of digital dexterity rather than shortcomings in your lateral thinking abilities. And progress is what you want to make, because *Out Of This World* is kind of game you can't stop playing.

Aesthetically, this is the best version yet: the draughtsmanship is superb and the backgrounds are gorgeous. The music is excellent too, making a crucial contribution to the game's atmosphere. But it's a pity the in-game characters weren't given a facelift; although they move well, they tend to look drab against such vibrant backdrops.

But the main failing of the 3DO *Out Of This World*, like every other version, is that it's over too soon. It's basically a victim of its own success – its addictive nature means that you keep playing until you finish it. Interplay could have used the 3DO version as an opportunity to expand the game, but it missed its chance. The result is that, apart from the aesthetic improvements, there's nothing new here; it's just the same game in a different package. Which is no bad thing, but most of us have seen it all before.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten

Theme Park

Format: PC Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Bullfrog Origin: UK Date: 1994

Reviewed in E11

Anyone who's played *Sim City 2000* knows how engrossing running your own city is. Well, imagine how much more attractive running a theme park must be: not only do you attract paying customers eager for a minor coronary, but you can also charge them ridiculous prices for tatty kitsch and runny ice creams.

This, in a nutshell, is what *Theme Park* is about. Competing against up to ten other computer-controlled players, your task is to set up the ultimate thrill-laden attraction. Starting with a bare field, you lay out paths, install life-threatening rides, and build shops and fast food joints. Add a few handymen to keep the place tidy, a team of mechanics to service the rides, throw in a lake or two to make the place look nice, and you're ready to open. At this stage, the game is a delight to look at: the rides whirl maniacally, each playing its own seductive tune, while the customers mill about in search of excitement. Your objective is to make your park pleasant and enjoyable enough to pull in the punters, which then enables you to turn a profit.

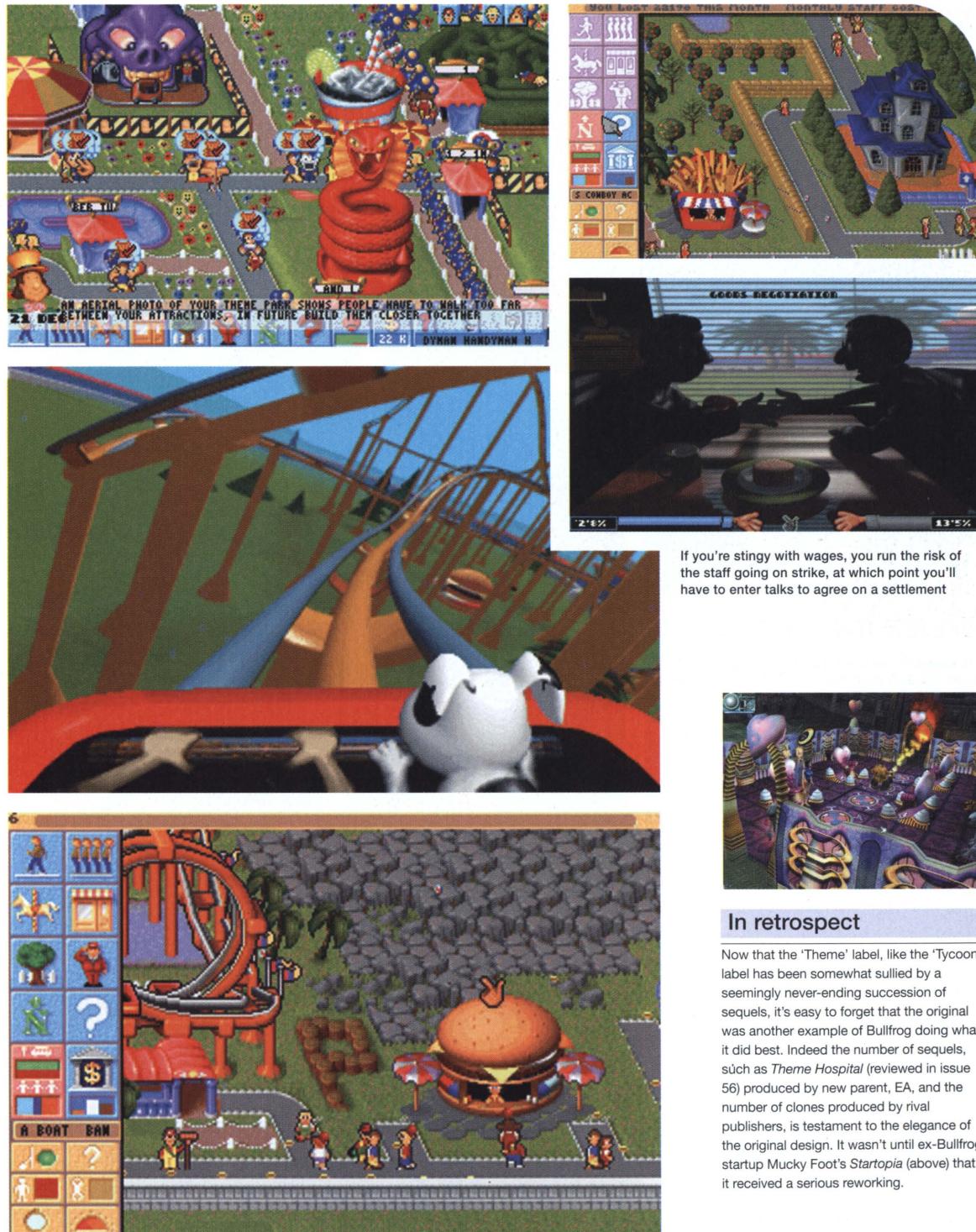
The amount of detail crammed into this initially simplistic game is incredible. For instance, placing an ice cream shop next to a ride increases the chances that a queasy customer will lose their lunch after a quick spin. If other similarly stuffed visitors see the vomit, they're likely to chuck up themselves, resulting in what the manual gracefully refers to as 'chain chunder'. This can get seriously out of hand: employ more handymen to clear up the mess and they end up moaning about wages, which could lead to a strike if you don't come up with a suitable settlement. And so on.

At the full simulation level you're constantly assailed with problems; the park layout itself almost becomes secondary as you grapple with orders for French fries, desperately try to make some cash on the stock market and worry about the state of your toilets. At this level, the game is perhaps a bit too clever for its own good – far more than its nearest competitor, *Sim City 2000*. There's no point at which you can sit back and watch the park tick over on its own, unless you sacrifice a lot of detail (and addictiveness) by opting for the easier sim levels. Nevertheless there's enough variety and graphical appeal to make the challenge worthwhile. But as the manual says, just don't expect a 'walk in the park'.



Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



A neat intro (middle) shows a hurl-inducing rollercoaster in action. Sadly, this kind of view isn't available ingame. The basic, isometric graphics of *Theme Park* are fine for the 'Sim'-style management gameplay

If you're stingy with wages, you run the risk of the staff going on strike, at which point you'll have to enter talks to agree on a settlement

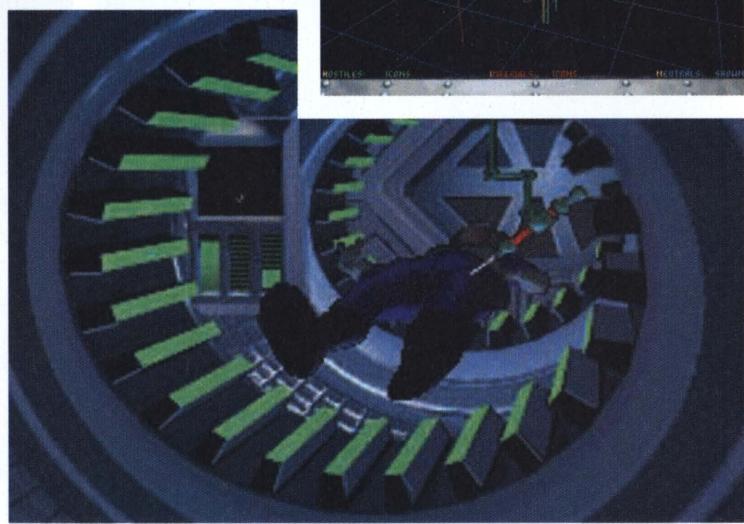
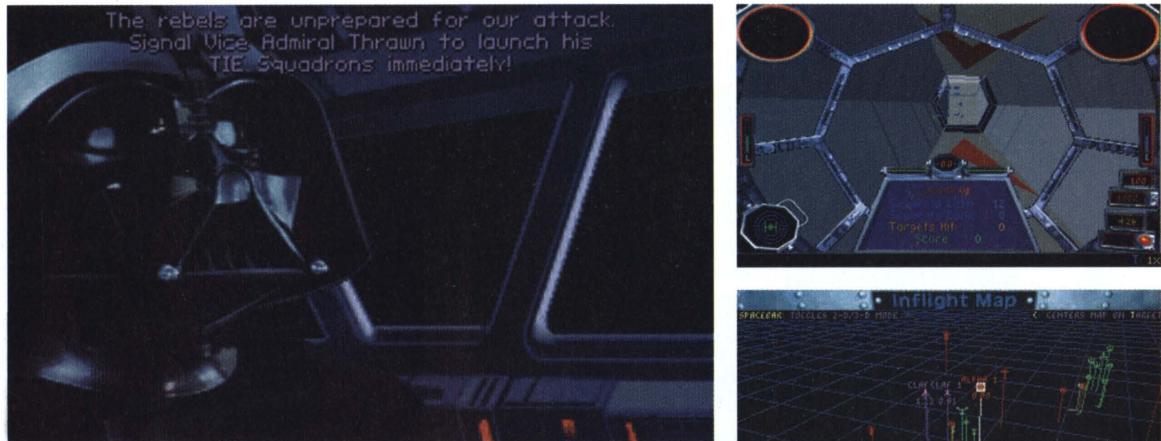
In retrospect

Now that the 'Theme' label, like the 'Tycoon' label has been somewhat sullied by a seemingly never-ending succession of sequels, it's easy to forget that the original was another example of Bullfrog doing what it did best. Indeed the number of sequels, such as *Theme Hospital* (reviewed in issue 56) produced by new parent, EA, and the number of clones produced by rival publishers, is testament to the elegance of the original design. It wasn't until ex-Bullfrog startup Mucky Foot's *Startopia* (above) that it received a serious reworking.

TIE Fighter

Format: PC Publisher: Virgin Developer: LucasArts Origin: US Date: 1994

Reviewed in E12



The mixture of realtime 3D combat and animated cut-scenes successfully illustrates the 'Star Wars' universe – but from the Empire's point of view

In retrospect

Arriving after *X-Wing* and before *X-Wing Alliance*, *TIE Fighter* made up for the disappointment of *Rebel Assault* and scaled gameplay heights that the *Rogue Squadron* series has yet to reach. Even now, the game's sublimely balanced difficulty curve has much to offer any developer. In hindsight it's easy to point out that **Edge**'s rating of seven out of ten was a tad unkind, given that it is *TIE Fighter* and not *X-Wing* that has stood the test of time. But given the moral reservations that **Edge** held at the time about fighting for the Empire cause, this is perhaps excusable.



The status panel at the bottom of the screen shows the current target's vital statistics. Once its shields have been destroyed, its hull begins to absorb all the damage

TIE Fighter begins where the classic (but now dated) *X-Wing* left off. This time you play an Imperial pilot, flying a TIE Fighter against the Rebels. At the start of the game, the Emperor summons his fleet to the city planet of Coruscant to inform you that the Rebels are in a vulnerable position. With your help they can finally be defeated.

Although *TIE Fighter* employs the same basic graphics engine as *X-Wing*, LucasArts has managed to produce a technically superior title. The Rubik's Cube graphics of *X-Wing* have been jettisoned and now all the ships actually look like ships. There's a lot of them too: *TIE Fighter* features 33 previously unseen craft, including six space platforms, three different varieties of mine, a space tug and a modular conveyor. The cut-scenes are also longer, the space station is larger and the sound is better.

However, it's not until you actually start playing the game that you notice the real refinements. The principal improvement is that each mission now has primary, secondary and bonus objectives, so you can tackle as much or as little as you want (only the primary objectives need to be completed to progress to the next mission). In the first few missions, you fly the base model TIE Fighter, which doesn't possess shields. With two hits almost always meaning the end of your ship, a more circumspect approach to achieving your goals is required. In later missions, you get to fly more sophisticated craft, but the Rebel ships gain a similar boost in performance.

TIE Fighter's major drawback is that most of the missions are essentially the same: fly around for a while, shoot a few Rebel ships, guard a container pod, return to base. The story does incorporate a few interesting subplots, in which the Emperor's agents recruit you for special missions, but the thrills are strictly short-term. The greatest satisfaction to be gained from computer games derives from the knowledge that you've triumphed against the odds. This is lacking in *TIE Fighter*. No longer are you the heroic underdog fighting for a noble cause; you know that the Empire with its huge fleet of ships will win against the Rebel's paltry forces, and that your own efforts, no matter how spectacular, won't make a jot of difference in the long-term.

TIE Fighter may be technically better than its predecessor, but it's nowhere near as enjoyable as *X-Wing*.



Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Alone In The Dark

Format: 3DO Publisher: Interplay Developer: Krysalis/Adeline Origin: France Date: 1994

Reviewed in E13

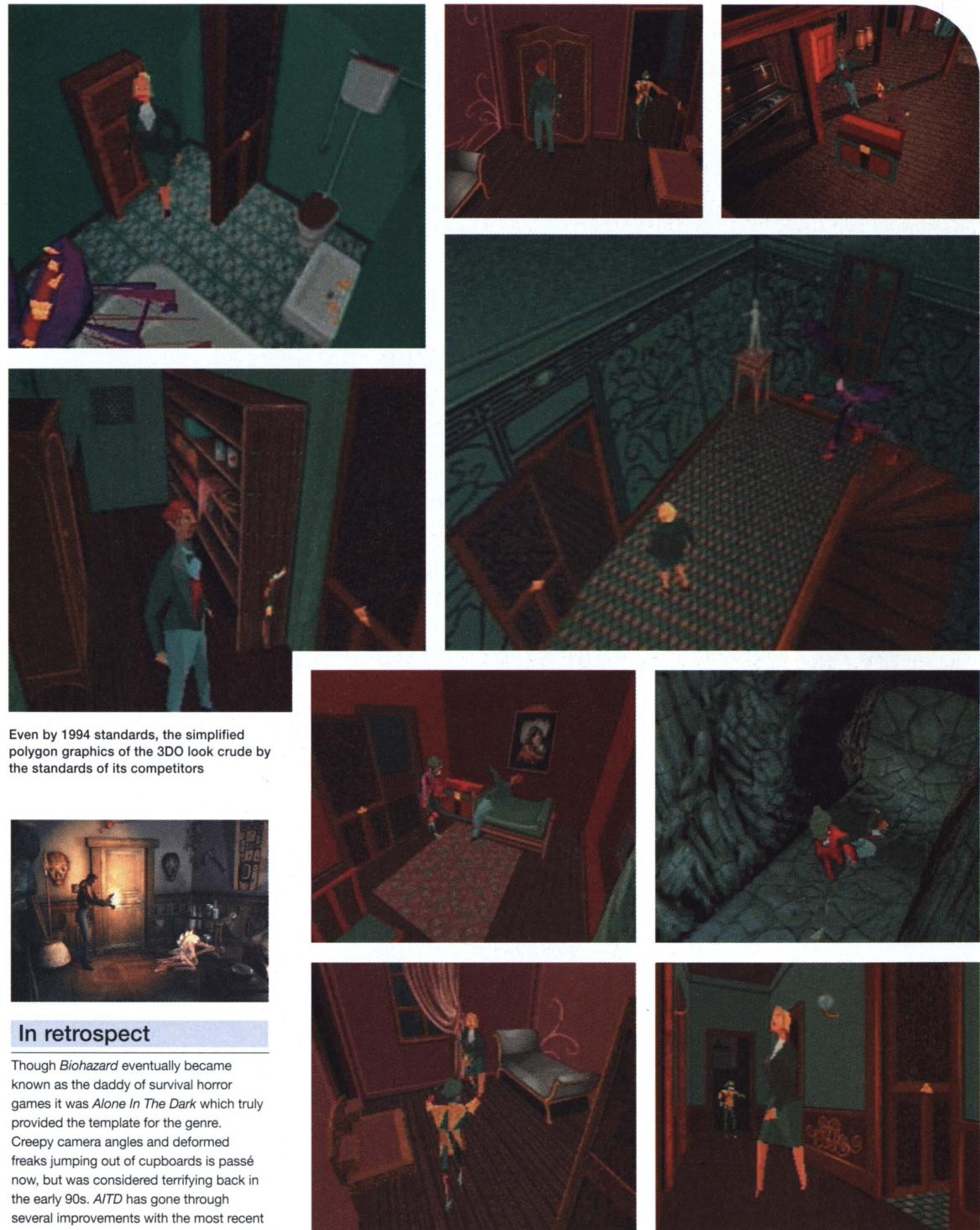
For the most part, 3DO *Alone In The Dark* looks identical to the PC version – and includes some unnecessarily large borders around the screen. But despite this, *Alone In The Dark* still manages to impress in the most important area: gameplay. Unlike rival 3DO game *Doctor Hauzer*, the brainteasers on offer differ greatly in style. The puzzles in Riverhill's game involve performing essentially simple actions, such as putting flowers in a vase; the trick lies in working out that the flowers need to be put in the vase in the first place. In *Alone In The Dark* it's more obvious what you have to do, but the puzzles themselves are far more rewarding to solve.

But what really makes *Alone In The Dark* stand out is its horrifyingly authentic combat scenes that add immeasurably to the game's atmosphere. Your character only has basic punch and kick moves, but the manner in which he executes them – and the way the monsters reel backwards after being hit – is disturbingly lifelike. The hand-to-hand conflict can get repetitive after a while, but, thanks to the relatively naturalistic animation and the wide variety of enemies, it gives the game a great deal more punch.

Thankfully, you don't just have to rely on your fists to fight your way through the house; there's also an assortment of weapons lying scattered around with which you can defend yourself. Some of these are extremely satisfying to use – especially the double-barrelled shotgun – and make a significant contribution to your enjoyment of the game.

The house at the centre of the *Alone In The Dark* mystery only contains a small number of rooms. And so although your journey is exciting, you'll still find yourself meeting the end of the adventure rather too abruptly. Movement around the mansion is also hampered by the fiddly controls – the PC version plays brilliantly with the cursor keys while the 3DO joypad makes playing *Alone In The Dark* a frequently irksome experience. Another problem is that animation that was perfectly smooth on a 486/33 PC seems to chug slightly on the 3DO.

Despite these flaws 3DO *Alone In The Dark* is a great game – a group of particularly stupid monkeys would have had a job mucking up this conversion. It looks good, gameplay is engrossing, and the soundtrack is atmospheric. And it's worth noting that this two-year-old title is more playable than much modern 3DO software.



Even by 1994 standards, the simplified polygon graphics of the 3DO look crude by the standards of its competitors



In retrospect

Though *Biohazard* eventually became known as the daddy of survival horror games it was *Alone In The Dark* which truly provided the template for the genre. Creepy camera angles and deformed freaks jumping out of cupboards is passé now, but was considered terrifying back in the early 90s. *AITD* has gone through several improvements with the most recent version *The New Nightmare* (above) bowing to the superiority of the *Biohazard* series by ripping off its control mechanism.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



The original PC *Alone In The Dark* was the first adventure game to incorporate different camera angles. The use of interesting and varied viewpoints gives the game its distinctive cinematic feel

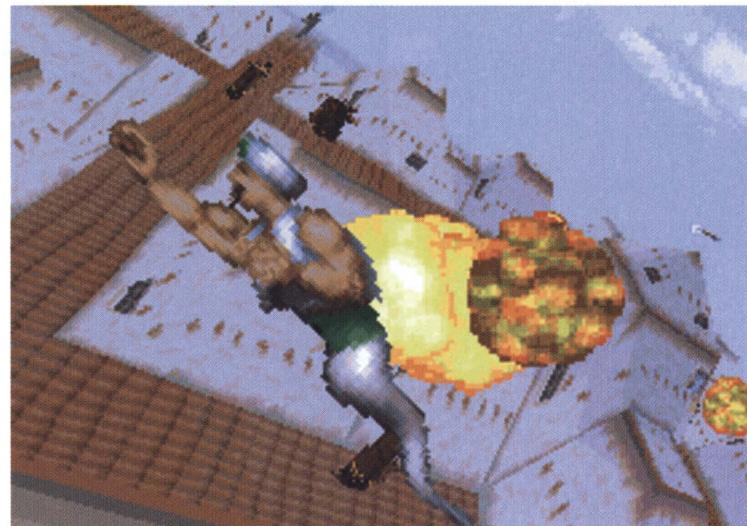
Magic Carpet

Format: PC Developer: Bullfrog Publisher: EA Origin: UK Date: 1994

Reviewed in E15



Bullfrog's typical attention to detail is carried throughout the game, to inventory screens, menus, maps and so on



Magic Carpet's detailed 3D terrain is quite spectacular. Realtime deformation of the landscape is reminiscent of Populous, but carried out on a much grander scale

Bullfrog has always had a reputation for excessive originality. *Magic Carpet* is no exception. Its appeal is immediate and obvious – luscious 3D graphics. For *Magic Carpet*, Bullfrog has created a superb realtime environment, an undulating landscape that scrolls beneath you with breathtaking speed and smoothness. It's easy to marvel at *Magic Carpet*'s rolling hills and valleys, lakes and mountain ranges, all depth-cued and shaded so that they faded into distant mist.

In the game, you play a wizard who, while zooming around on a flying rug, must battle with rival wizards in each of the game's 50 worlds. Killing any of the creatures that populate the gameworld releases their magical energy in the form of a Mana ball. Casting a spell turns these balls from a neutral gold into your own playing colour, thereby allowing you to dispatch a balloon from your castle to collect them. The more Mana you collect, the more powerful you become and the more spells you can cast against your enemies. Good wizarding here is a case of perfecting your flying skills and your reflexes.

But while *Magic Carpet* is obviously a full-on arcade trip, it also retains a degree of strategy. On the lower levels, it's easy enough to collect enough Mana to defeat a single rival wizard, fighting a battle of resources that concludes with an aerial assault on your opponent's castle. But the more you play, the trickier this process becomes. The creatures (ranging from giant bees to dragons and skeletal armies) get harder to kill and it's more difficult to amass that vital Mana. New powers are also introduced, supplementing the basic Fireball magic with Meteors, landscape-splitting Earthquakes and a Volcano spell that can create a lava-spewing crater. Unfortunately, if you can gain access to these advanced hexes, so can your opponent.

At its most basic level, *Magic Carpet* represents an inspired mix of *Populous* and an arcade shoot 'em up. So it's the best of both worlds: not only is it a visual treat, an exhilarating experience and a frantic blast, but it also incorporates just the right amount of strategy to ensure that you never get bored. Its graphics mark a leap forward in notions of what is possible on a PC and there are even 3D and stereogram modes. Better still perhaps, *Magic Carpet* also features a network option, allowing up to eight players to contest the same airspace in a frantic orgy of multiplayer violence.

In retrospect

The passage of time hasn't been too kind to the gameplay at the heart of *Magic Carpet*; there are widespread examples of better pacing and incentivisation. And although the 3D terrain engine looks dated now, it's difficult not to think that an opportunity might have been missed given the current trend for licensing game engines.

This title marked a departure from the god sims that had made a global reputation for British developer, Bullfrog. After the company was acquired by EA, founder Peter Molyneux moved to pastures new at Lionhead, though not before returning to the genre with *Dungeon Keeper* (above). A fitting swansong, it managed to stay true to the basic ethos of the god sim, while turning much received wisdom on its head. A little bit like his first Lionhead title, *Black & White*.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

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Virtua TennisTM 2

— SEGA PROFESSIONAL TENNIS —

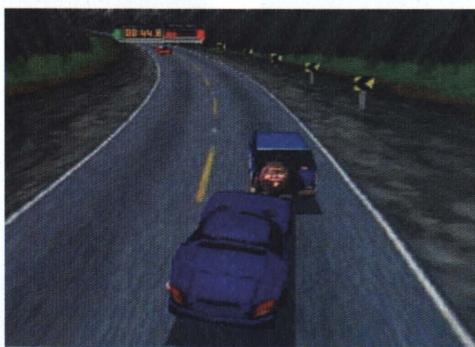
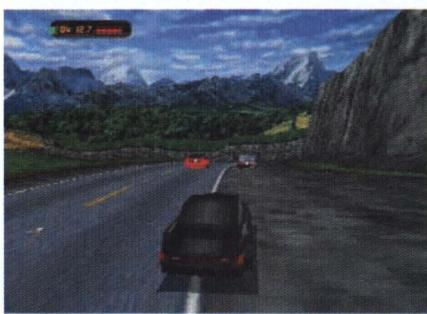
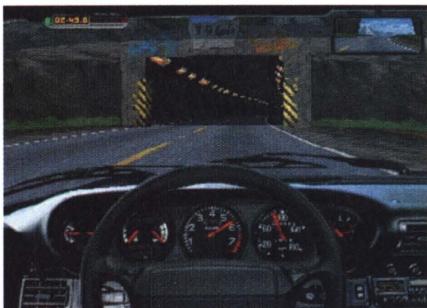


Dreamcast™

The Need For Speed

Format: 3DO Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: In-house Origin: Canada Date: 1995

Reviewed in E16



Unlike most racers where the cars are fixed in the horizontal plane, the vehicles in *The Need For Speed* are free to perform all manner of No-Claims Bonus-ruining manoeuvres

TNFS features most of the muscle marques you could want, including the Dodge Viper (above), NSX, Ferrari and Lambo

Everyone knows that it's not enough for a game to look 'nice'. Great games depend on a skilful blend of mind-blowing graphics and absorbing gameplay. Some titles try to get by with spectacular visuals on their own, but they can rarely disguise their fundamental lack of playability. And, of course, others can't even manage half-decent graphics, let alone enjoyable gameplay.

Appearing on the 3DO, *The Need For Speed* gets the graphics side of the equation just right. It is clearly the best-looking title on the console, using polygons to generate the cars, road signs, barriers and trees that dot the landscape as you hurtle by in sleek roadsters. This is especially remarkable when you consider how far into the distance the road is drawn – at times it stretches right to the horizon, wending its way through hills and over bridges to get there. Everything moves reasonably fast, too – the game is as nippy as great rival *Road Rash*, but it's beautifully smooth and exceptionally detailed. Even the crashes are spectacular. Watching your car tumble bonnet over tail down the tarmac is one of the highlights of the game.

True, *The Need For Speed*'s gameplay isn't quite so flawless. The object of the game is to drive faster than your opponent and post the quickest time. Three courses await the reckless driver and eight speedsters are available, including a Lamborghini Diablo, a Ferrari 512TR and a Porsche 911. The handling characteristics of the real cars have been painstakingly incorporated into their simulated TNFS counterparts (and animated accordingly), giving each one a radically different driving feel. Unlike *Ridge Racer* and coin-ops like *Cruisin' USA*, *The Need For Speed* is part driving 'game', part driving 'sim', arguably one of the first titles to successfully blend automotive realism with white-knuckle arcade action.

Unfortunately, when you tire of your car's capacity for performing handbrake turns, donuts and ramming manoeuvres, *The Need For Speed* doesn't offer any extended action. The three courses are easily accessible, and there is little reward for actually winning a race. Ultimately, while it fuel-injects realism into the racing game genre, *The Need For Speed* does so at the expense of addictive gameplay. It's more enjoyable simulation than fast-paced arcade experience (not surprising, since the game's developers were also responsible for Amiga *Test Drive*).

In retrospect

While realism-influenced racing games are the norm these days, things were a little different some seven years ago. *TNFS* proved genuinely refreshing and would certainly have been rewarded with a sizeable following had its host system not failed to secure the public's disposable income in such notable fashion. The series survived on systems succeeding the ill-fated 3DO yet not one of these sequels managed to match – let alone come close to – the original's appeal, successfully (if bizarrely) removing the key ingredients that made *TNFS* so special instead.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Virtua Fighter

Format: Saturn ■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: AM2 ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 1995

Reviewed in E17

Not since the market-shaking *Sonic* has Sega had so much depending on the success of one game. New hardware needs great software to sell it, so it's no exaggeration to say that *Virtua Fighter* is Sega's most important release for years.

Sega entrusted the Saturn conversion of *Virtua Fighter* to the game's original developers, AM2, and it's easy to see why. Saturn *Virtua Fighter* has all the pulling power of the arcade version, including the swooping, gliding game camera, the stylish polygonal characters, the convincing animation and the compulsive gameplay.

The first thing that strikes you about *Virtua Fighter* is its graphics. They were impressive enough in the original, but on the Saturn, under the kind of intense scrutiny you can never give a game in the arcades, they emerge as simply astounding.

Although the characters (which are all made up of around 1,200 polygons) look good in static screenshots, it's the superb animation that brings them to life. The full roster of arcade moves is included in the Saturn version, and every movement is realistically animated and weighted. *Virtua Fighter*'s 3D characters have a presence that 2D sprites just can't match. The characters really do seem 'alive', whether they're throwing a punch, unleashing a special move or reeling from a blow.

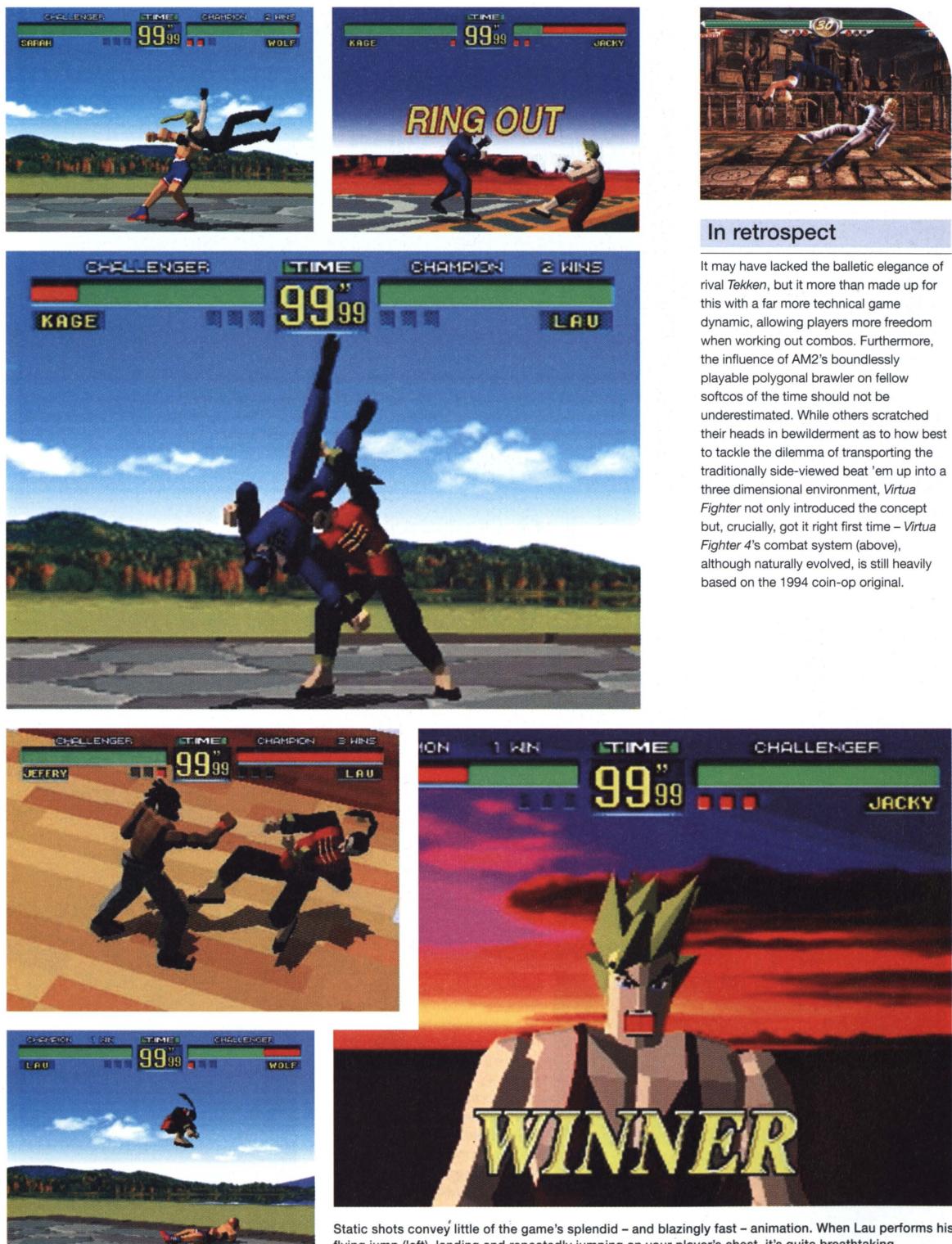
For all the game's technical innovations, there's an elegant simplicity about *Virtua Fighter*. The characters move on a single axis, with only throws and falls sending them to different parts of the arena. All the moves are instinctive and the characters are a well-balanced bunch, offering a choice of power, speed or agility, plenty of possible combos and rewarding special attacks. In stark contrast to, say, *Street Fighter II*, everything is controlled with just three buttons: punch, kick and guard. This doesn't compromise the gameplay, though. In fact, it amplifies it.

The Saturn version of *Virtua Fighter* is exceptional in many respects. It's arguably the first true 'next generation' console game, fusing the best aspects of combat gameplay with groundbreaking animation and gorgeous sound (CD music and clear samples). In the arcades, *Virtua Fighter* made people stop and look. On the Saturn, it will make many people stop, look at their bank balance and then fork out for Sega's new machine. Over to you, Sony.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Static shots convey little of the game's splendid – and blazingly fast – animation. When Lau performs his flying jump (left), landing and repeatedly jumping on your player's chest, it's quite breathtaking

In retrospect

It may have lacked the balletic elegance of rival *Tekken*, but it more than made up for this with a far more technical game dynamic, allowing players more freedom when working out combos. Furthermore, the influence of AM2's boundlessly playable polygonal brawler on fellow softcos of the time should not be underestimated. While others scratched their heads in bewilderment as to how best to tackle the dilemma of transporting the traditionally side-viewed beat 'em up into a three dimensional environment, *Virtua Fighter* not only introduced the concept but, crucially, got it right first time – *Virtua Fighter*'s combat system (above), although naturally evolved, is still heavily based on the 1994 coin-op original.

Rise Of The Robots

Format: PC Publisher: Interplay Developer: Mirage Origin: UK Date: 1995

Reviewed in E17



In retrospect

When *Edge* previewed the game, with its now legendary 'Graphics To Die For' cover, expectations were genuinely high. And, in truth, the information and artwork afforded the magazine were impressive enough to justify its inclusion. Sadly, it transpired this material was mostly a work of fiction, embellished with PR spin. *Edge* was, in effect, duped.

When *Rise* eventually appeared – a flawed, uninspired, unfinished, non-game (the Amiga version could be completed by wedging the joystick top/right and activating autofire) – the score was duly dismal. But *Rise Of The Robots* remains an albatross round the neck of *Edge*.



The sculpted backdrops and robot sprites (pre-rendered in 3D Studio Max) have set a precedent that, no doubt, many games will follow. However, it also helps to include some degree of gameplay...

On paper it seems like a publisher's dream: an aggressive beat 'em up in the *Street Fighter II/Mortal Kombat* mould, with the kind of photorealistic imagery that leaves window shoppers agog.

The lovingly rendered fighters move as well as they look, the sound effects are satisfactorily meaty and metallic, and it's all wrapped up in some exquisite presentation and graphical gloss. But, surprise surprise, problems arise when you begin to play.

Modern-day beat 'em up aficionados recognise the qualities that make classics like *SFII* and *MKII* so playable: good characters, fast and frenetic action with a wide variety of moves and the ability to learn and improve your game through the use of advanced techniques. Astoundingly, none of these qualities are evident in *Rise*. The combatants are slow and clumsy, and their range of moves is limited: fighters can't even jump over one another, which eliminates a wide range of techniques and gameplay possibilities.

But *Rise*'s inability to copy the qualities of games like *SFII* and *MK* isn't the issue – it's entitled to its own style, after all. The real problem is that it's just so unsatisfying and frustrating to play. Truly awful.

Edge rating:

Two out of ten



Descent

Format: PC Publisher: Interplay Developer: Parallax Software Origin: US Date: 1995

Reviewed in E19

Descent is an attempt to mix that true 3D world with the excitement of *Doom*. Initially, it's a bewildering and wonderful experience: there's no defined up and down, no left and right, just confined spaces to move about in, which is deeply confusing until you master the complex controls. You can spend the first two levels of the game just admiring the flawless, intricately detailed texture mapping, the shading effects and the incredible sound, and forget about formulating tactics to fend off the enemy. Then, when you become adept at close-quarters combat, it looks like you might have stumbled upon the best shoot 'em up ever.

That's not quite the case. *Descent* is noisy and frenetic and gets the adrenaline pumping to all the right places, yet something stops it from being a true classic. Maybe it's the awkwardness of the controls, or maybe the game is just slightly too repetitive. And although the enemies' AI improves radically later on, they still don't do much more than fire and evade. Yes, *Descent* is streets, if not whole cities, ahead of *Doom* in terms of technology. But people are still enjoying the latter not just because of the underlying code, but also because of the ethos and the atmosphere.



In retrospect

The blocky resolution and digitised explosions look dated now, but *Descent*'s true-3D polygonal ethic hasn't paled one bit. The first moments your ship twisted upside down and plunged through a gap in the floor proved dizzying, but perhaps that extra degree of freedom – and the associated concentration required to navigate within the tightly-wound maze arenas – was too much for a generation of 3D adventurers used to the smoke-and-mirrors 2D structure of iD's *Doom*. Still, the game proved popular enough to warrant two sequels, and seems ripe for a next-gen update.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



Vertiginous, disorientating passageways require substantial application of the player's spatial awareness – and the wireframe 3D map also comes in handy

Tekken

Format: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Namco ■ Developer: In-house ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 1995

■ Reviewed in E21

Namco took a significant risk in basing its *Tekken* coin-op on raw PlayStation hardware, considering that it would be competing directly with Sega's Model 2-powered *Virtua Fighter 2*. But, as arcade gamers around the globe will testify, that decision was vindicated: although lacking the overall visual allure of VF2, *Tekken* not only matches the style and quality of Sega's character animation, but it pushes its rival to the wire in playability terms, too.

And now, for once, a home system can boast an identical conversion of a cutting-edge coin-op – that overused phrase 'arcade perfect' actually does apply to PlayStation *Tekken*. Regardless of its merits as a conversion, though, the game welcomes scrutiny in its own right – it's fair to say that it jostles with *Ridge Racer* for consideration as the best PlayStation game yet.

Patently taking its inspiration from the *Virtua Fighter* series, *Tekken* presents a 3D polygon environment furnished with *Virtua Fighter*-style 2D gameplay. A selection of eight fighters present themselves at start-up, each with his/her own range of special techniques, and the action takes place against a range of backdrops, varying in colour from the calm blue tones of Lake Windermere to the deep red hues of the superb Monument Valley stage, complete with slowly setting sun.

Rarely has the difference between static screenshots and the game itself been so pronounced as it is with *Tekken*. In action, *Tekken* is like no other title available on a home system. And beneath *Tekken*'s head-turning graphical flair lies a beat 'em up of unmatched sophistication. Although it essentially plays very similarly to *Virtua Fighter*, *Tekken* differs in that each of the PlayStation pad's four main buttons controls a fighter's limb, each of which in turn has its own characteristics. The game arguably has as many possible moves as *Virtua Fighter*, plus many other cunning tactics to enhance gameplay. When floored by an opponent, for instance, it's possible to either get straight to your feet, roll towards or away from danger, or even flip directly back into the fray with an attack – a hugely satisfying gameplay twist.

Tekken rips up the rulebook and delivers an experience that even its £2,000 coin-op namesake can't match. Expect to see it alongside *Ridge Racer* on the shelf marked 'Absolute Essentials'.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Tekken's unmatched range of characters, relatively simple control system and wealth of cleverly animated moves ensures longevity. The graphics aren't too shabby either

In retrospect

Like the majority of Namco productions, *Tekken*'s world is highly controlled. Dividing a character's limbs by the joypad's main four fascia buttons did much to attract those who'd previously shied away from the heavily technical nature of beat 'em ups of the time. Yet its accessibility (another Namco trait) is, in part, responsible for the rather rigid gameplay template offered – combinations are learned and memorised rather than discovered.

But whatever the pros and cons of *Tekken*'s fighting technique, the sumptuous – and fast – 3D graphics played a major role in cementing PlayStation as a serious gaming platform. Sadly, its sequels and the much-anticipated PS2 incarnation failed to generate the same degree of fervour.

Daytona USA

Format: Saturn | Publisher: Sega | Developer: AM2 | Origin: Japan | Date: 1995

Reviewed in E21



While ardent fans of the coin-op will be able to see past Daytona's manifold flaws, gamers opting to go the *Ridge Racer* route have chosen more wisely...

If it weren't for *Ridge Racer*, there's little doubt that *Daytona USA* would have been regarded as the ultimate next-generation videogame. Five months ago, its strong Japanese design, fast-paced action and cult arcade status would have clinched it for the Saturn. But unfortunately for Sega, Namco has pipped it to the post, and *Daytona* now has a formidable adversary to contend with in *Ridge Racer*.

Devotees of the coin-op will be reassured to learn that the home version of *Daytona* has retained almost all of the features that made the original an arguably more substantial experience than *Ridge Racer*. Powerslides, collisions, manically swerving competitors and sophisticated artificial intelligence all help to compensate for any initial disappointment at the graphics. The AI of *Daytona*'s cars is also greatly superior – rival cars intelligently block your path with violent swerving manoeuvres. This gives the game added depth and the excitement is enhanced by the fact that there are up to 40 cars on the track at once.

The arcade's four views have been retained, allowing you to adapt the game to your own racing style. The game also comes equipped with a number of driving options that allow you to eek out every last moment of pleasure from the title. A 'Saturn' mode offers a range of new cars, while the 'Endurance' and 'Grand Prix' options provide a more realistic racing environment – pit stops now have to be included in your tactics. There are three different courses, each of which offer their own challenge. This gives *Daytona* a significant longevity advantage over *Ridge Racer*, which, despite its plethora of track options, essentially has only one course.

But although AM2 has managed to replicate the coin-op tolerably well, Saturn *Daytona* fails to capture the arcade experience that PlayStation *Ridge Racer* so convincingly delivers. The game's rough-and-ready looks would be acceptable if the track and scenery were drawn to the horizon, but the crucial graphical weakness is that it blocks in huge chunks of scenery disturbingly late.

Ultimately, *Daytona* suffers from an accumulation of niggles which ensures that it never quite manages to fulfil its enormous potential. If you're expecting an arcade-perfect conversion, you'll be slightly disappointed, but if it's a fast, thrilling racing game you're after, *Daytona USA* has a great deal to recommend it.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

In retrospect

You have to wonder how *Daytona USA* scored so highly, particularly as the vastly superior *Sega Rally* only managed the same score just eight issues later. Saturn *Daytona* may have kept the machine's hardware rather busy and retained some of the coin-op's essence but it was letterboxed, offered restrictive controls, looked and sounded terrible while also drawing distressingly little of the road ahead, which made it incredibly frustrating to play. One of AM2's lowest moments, and a rare lapse of concentration for Edge.

Jumping Flash

Format: PlayStation Publisher: SCEI Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1995

Reviewed in E22

The first six months of the PlayStation's existence has been distinguished by games derived from existing genres: racing games, beat 'em ups, shoot 'em ups, scrolling platform games, RPGs and so on. Sony's technology has enabled these games to be presented in an aesthetically pleasing manner, but so far none has really added anything unique to their respective genres.

Jumping Flash is the first title to take an age-old game style and really shake it by the throat. Admittedly, it is a platform game – the oldest genre in the book – but this is as far removed from *Donkey Kong* as *Donkey Kong* was from *Pong*.

Star of the show is Robbit, a robotic rabbit, and it's through his pink eyes that the game world is viewed. Each level is essentially a three-dimensional island – or group of islands – floating high above a cloudscape. These islands are littered with buildings, towers, hazards and creatures indigenous to each themed area. The idea is simple: Robbit has to retrieve four carrot-shaped jetpods that have been secreted about the level. As you progress through the game, they're hidden in less accessible locations.

Jumping Flash is a clever idea, brilliantly executed. The depth-cued 3D graphics are wonderful, capturing all the right sensations of height and distance. They're also mostly glitch free and seemingly rendered with ease. As well as being a demonstration of the PlayStation's graphical prowess, *Jumping Flash* actually plays very well. Platforms are cunningly positioned so that you often have to make daring leaps into space, landing with the merest of margins. And much has been made of the 3D aspect, with platforms suspended hundreds of feet in the air, requiring nimble athletics to reach them.

The enjoyment may be a little too short-lived – only the most joypad-indept gamers will struggle to complete the entire game in a few days. But as an enjoyable, enthralling gaming experience, *Jumping Flash* is without equal. But, like a suspiciously high number of 'next generation' titles, it's a long way from being a worthwhile investment. It's a shame that there are no secret stages or unusual tasks to perform. And, given the amount of storage space liberated by the CD revolution, the fact that it has just 12 distinct, complex levels (the remainder are much more straightforward Boss stages) means that gamers would be right to feel short-changed.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Jumping Flash is divided into stages, each of which ends with a Boss level. Annoyingly, these take place in an enclosed labyrinth (main shot, above), which completely negates Robbit's jumping prowess. It's as if designing all those 3D landscapes just got too much for *Jumping Flash*'s progenitors

Robbit's task is to collect the large energy carrots that litter each level. The multi-coloured rollercoaster level (above) offers a wild ride

In retrospect

As Edge's review states, *Jumping Flash* really did broker an entirely new concept for the PlayStation, and enjoyed some notoriety because of it. Commercially, the game was successful enough to warrant a sequel, though *Jumping Flash 2* was very much more of the same, and failed to rectify criticisms levelled at its predecessor. Sadly the franchise ended there, but its vertiginous platforming delights could be eloquently realised on Sony's current 128bit hardware. Just ditch the tunnel sections, OK?

Command & Conquer

Format: PC Publisher: Virgin Developer: Westwood Studios Origin: US Date: 1995



An engineer (top) heads for an enemy structure. Even the early levels are extremely challenging – expect to get your money's worth from this one

Some games have everything in their favour yet ultimately fail to live up to expectations. *Command & Conquer* has been lavished with pre-launch publicity, marketing hype and 90 per cent-plus review scores from various games magazines. So it's regrettable that if you step back and take a good, long look at the game, you see that it's an only slightly improved version of a previous Westwood Studios game, the excellent *Dune 2*, which appeared more than three years ago.

Command & Conquer's principal problem is the all too familiar curse of CD-ROM. The CD's huge storage capacity has seduced Westwood Studios into adding megabytes of extraneous story-development video footage, cut-scenes and tactical development information. Although they are among the best examples of their kind (they are even a match for those found in *Wing Commander 3*), the fact is you never actually play them. So, after a brief "isn't that nice", it's back to the game, where the paucity of innovation soon becomes evident.

Basically, it's all been seen before. Those familiar with *Dune 2* will remember constructing factories and sending troops off into uncharted enemy terrain to fight and capture buildings, while dedicated harvester

Playing *Command & Conquer* is a highly enjoyable experience. The game has enough depth to keep you going for hours



Constructing buildings quickly and defending your Tiberium harvester is vital to your success. Capturing enemy fortifications with engineers is an ideal way to gain ground quickly

units mine spice for money and return it to your base in order to finance further expansion. Substitute the spice for Tiberium and you can cross out "*Dune 2*" and scribble in "*Command & Conquer*".

Command & Conquer's plot is simple. Taking command of one of two organisations struggling for mastery of the world, you battle for control of countries, advancing or retreating according to the effectiveness of your resource-based strategies.

The actual game, although derivative, is great fun to play, offering a compelling combination of speed, strategy and surprise. The number of different enemies and buildings makes it possible to pick one of many courses to success (or failure). However, it's a shame that all the battles are shown in blocky VGA – with other strategy games such as *Syndicate*, *Sim City* and *Transport Tycoon* displayed in glorious SVGA, *Command & Conquer*'s chunky, predominantly brown pixels, look very dated.

But arguably the most important aspect of a game like *Command & Conquer* is the artificial intelligence – of your own forces as well as the enemy's. Your foe is controlled skilfully by the computer and offers a real challenge – it's hard to win any major skirmish without amassing considerable reinforcements. But your own troops aren't always so intelligent in their movements.

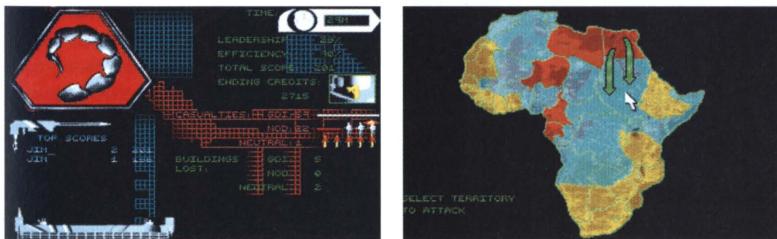
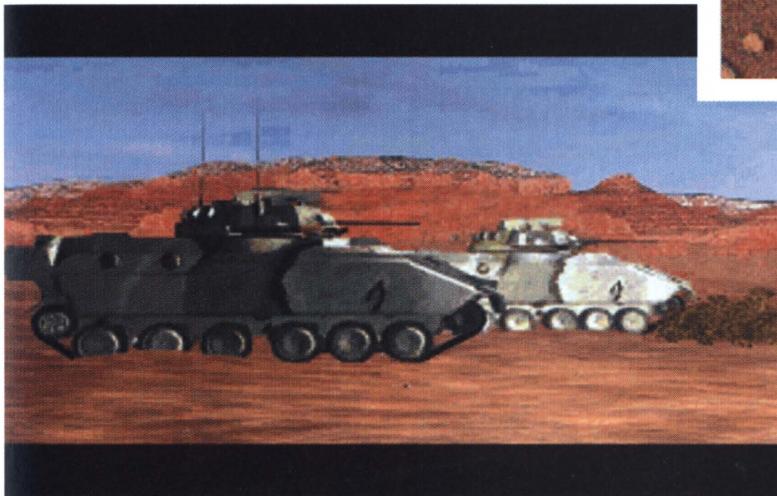
Obviously, you, the player, are the ultimate intelligence, but it's annoying when you click on a destination and move off to plan a coordinated offensive, returning only to find that your troops have unilaterally decided to wander off down a different valley and have been slaughtered. Cock-ups like these aren't particularly frequent, but they're extremely infuriating when they happen.

Command & Conquer's sound is excellent, with a thumping background rock track supplemented by realtime narration. The commentary not only enhances the atmosphere but also contributes greatly to mission planning. And given that you can rarely see all your units onscreen at once, it also serves to provide warnings if, for example, your prized engineers are about to be butchered.

Playing *Command & Conquer* is a highly enjoyable experience. The game has enough depth to keep you going for hours, and the multiplayer option extends its life still further. It's just unfortunate that there's nothing really new on offer apart from a few superficial additions. A company with the kind of talent that Westwood has at its disposal should have been capable of creating an excellent new game rather than rehashing an (admittedly superb) old one.



The panel on the right lists your current buildings and allows you to control your resources. Buildings appear in the left-hand column and available troops in the right-hand one



At the end of the mission your performance is rated (above left). This has an effect on the whole campaign. Tanks rumble across the desert (above centre) and it's your task to stop them

Prerendered sequences are employed to update the story between each mission and provide a briefing for the next (above). After each mission the computer zooms in on your combat area (left)

In retrospect

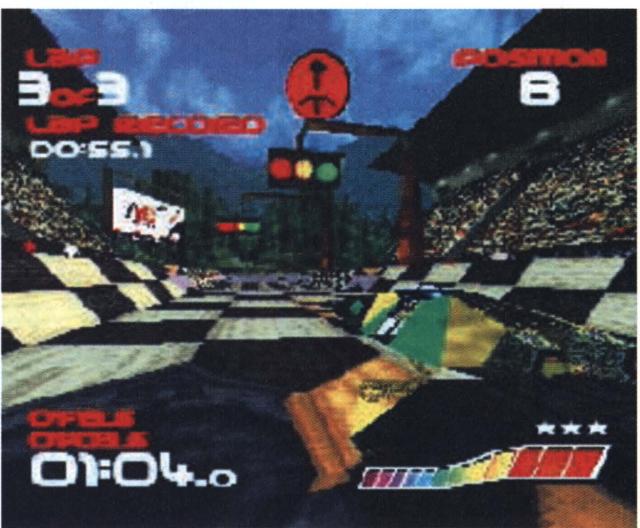


As Edge noted, with trademark perspicacity, *Command & Conquer* built on the foundations laid by *Dune 2*. Nevertheless, it was *Command & Conquer* that spawned the seemingly endless roster of sequels and clones that dominate the current PC landscape, so it was prescient of Edge to also add a caveat bemoaning the title's lack of originality; despite the relentless advance of the genre to the present day, the likes of the original *Command & Conquer* and Blizzard's *Warcraft 2* (left) have yet to be bettered.

Wipeout

Format: PlayStation Publisher: Sony Developer: Psygnosis Origin: UK Date: 1996

Reviewed in E25



An earthy, autumnal colour scheme and Designer's Republic aesthetics infuses Wipeout with a singular visual style. The use of billboards is an innovation, too

Wipeout brokers a new concept for PlayStation (though veteran gamers might draw comparisons to 16bit racer Powerdrome)

Most futuristic race games lack the feel and handling of real cars, usually because they simply spool tracks off CD and then plonk a few big sprites on top of them – witness Crash 'n Burn and Mega Race. Not so Wipeout, which not only creates an exhilarating sensation of speed, but also manages to serve up the most impressive graphics yet seen on the PlayStation. The fact that it's a racing game featuring futuristic hover cars/space ships gives it the kind of extra twist that immediately gets noticed.

Wipeout features six basic tracks, which get progressively harder as you play, introducing sharper corners and complexes of bends. When you've completed those, you can start on the six 'Rapier-class' tracks – night-time versions of the basic six that are around twice as fast and noticeably tougher. The course design is wonderfully imaginative, with dramatic features like huge drop-offs where the track disappears from under you.

There's a standard selection of themed locations – forests, canyons, an industrial cityscape – but all are highly atmospheric and well detailed. The monumental scale of the trackside barriers and surrounding scenery not only serves to mask the limited horizon drawn by the PlayStation but also forces the player to be constantly alert, adjusting the ships' path and thinking one corner ahead.

A lot of care has been lavished on the handling of the different ships. Flying on a cushion of air, the craft bob up and down convincingly, feeling satisfactorily weighty yet responding well to the gentle nudging required on the first couple of tracks. Move on to the later, more difficult courses and the tight corners require deft use of the twin air brakes.

In a nod to Super Mario Kart, markings on the track surface provide one-shot power-ups that can be used to gain valuable ground on the seven other intelligent computer opponents. In addition, arrows act as speed-ups – and on all but the first tracks it's vital to hit them if you hope to finish in the top three and qualify for the next race.

A soundtrack featuring tunes by Leftfield, The Chemical Brothers and Orbital augments this thrilling arcade experience, as does the two-machine link-up game. The simplistic championship structure and reliance on track-based power-ups limits Wipeout's lifespan, but it's hard to criticise such a beautifully realised and well-produced game that exploits the PlayStation's power so well.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

J-League Winning Eleven

Format: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: In-house ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 1995

■ Reviewed in E25

With pre-orders for 120,000 copies in Japan, the first polygon-based football game for the PlayStation certainly has a lot of expectation to live up to.

Unlike many of its soon-to-be rivals, *J-League Winning Eleven* is fairly restrained in its camera dynamics, with only three different views. There's a close-in perspective that follows the man on the ball (but this is fairly unplayable); plus a wider, low-down view that, again, is too narrow to be really practical when you are trying to pass and tackle and formulate some sort of attacking strategy.

Thankfully, there's also a wider side-on, TV-style view that doesn't compromise the gameplay. It shows off Konami's smooth-playing arcade mechanics rather than the strangely pointy graphics. But *J-League Winning Eleven* is blessed with an excellent control system. The main buttons of the pad are used to perform the different kicks, barges and tackles while the bottom shoulder buttons activate aftertouch.

The moves, particularly dribbling, passing and shooting, soon become instinctive, leaving you to concentrate on tactics and scoring – goals are typically spectacular blasts from yards outside the box. The action has a kickabout feel, but it's more sophisticated than in most previous Japanese football games and much more enjoyable. Matches always seem unpredictable, with new animations cropping up regularly and miskicks, fluffed saves and deflections mixing things up. Many football games fall down because there are only a few possible ways of scoring goals. But in *Winning Eleven* a huge variety of goal-scoring techniques rewards experimentation and keeps games fresh.

J-League Winning Eleven's angular, part-textured players may look rudimentary compared to other PlayStation football titles in the works, but all those games will have trouble matching the easy-going playability that distinguishes Konami's latest PlayStation effort. What's more important? The way that a football game looks or the way that a football game plays?



Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Replays (above) are shown automatically after each goal from one of several angles



In retrospect

The blueprint that was to turn into the beautiful game we know today was laid down in this charming debut. While **Edge** gave the game a decent score, the reviewer had clearly warmed to the Konami dynamics. The sophisticated passing manoeuvres were in place, so was the ability to score from a variety of positions rather than the 'sweet-spots' favoured by inferior titles. Since, the series has gone from strength to strength and though EA has occasionally threatened Konami's reign with a decent footie game, the *ISS* series (culminating in *Pro Evolution Soccer* on PS2) remains the connoisseurs choice.

There are 14 major J-League teams included in the game. The names and faces of players appear onscreen to show which ones you and your opponent are controlling

Chrono Trigger

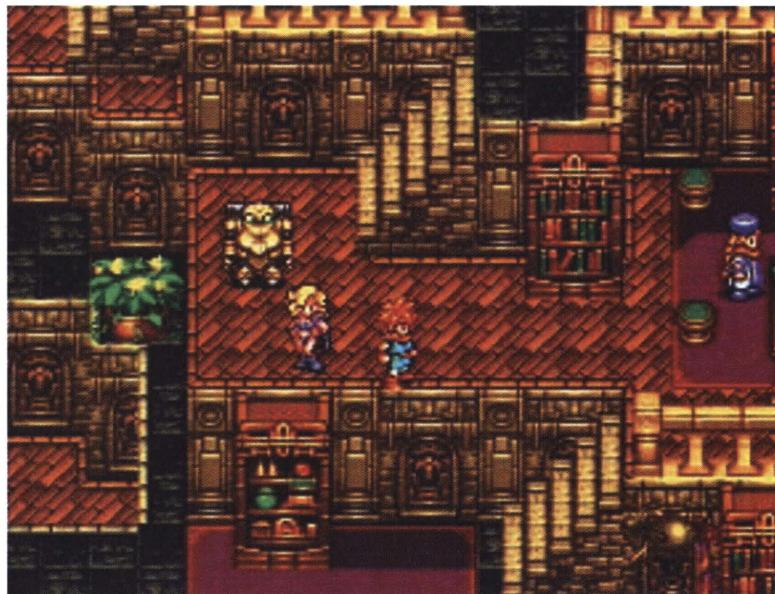
Format: SNES Publisher: SquareSoft Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1995

Reviewed in E26



In retrospect

US PlayStation owners and import gamers will no doubt be grateful for Square's recent decision to re-release *Chrono Trigger*, bundled with *Final Fantasy IV*. Sadly there are no plans to release the package in the UK, which is a shame, because despite *Edge*'s rather aloof reception at the time of its release, *Chrono Trigger* continues to be superior to the more acclaimed *Final Fantasy* series in the eyes of many.



The illusion of freedom to go anywhere you want is helped by a variety of different maps and views, although ultimately the storyline dictates whether or not you can reach a certain area

In the past year one game has lifted the reputation of the Japanese RPG tenfold. So popular has the US version of *Final Fantasy III* been that the translation of Square's next project, *Chrono Trigger*, has been as eagerly awaited as any action extravaganza.

The whole premise of *Chrono Trigger* revolves around time travel. Leaping in and out of the characters' pasts and futures in search of wizards and magic rocks seems initially confusing, but the packed storyline sticks firmly to the RPG tradition of linearity. Even if you can go everywhere, nothing happens unless it advances the story.

Although the game's battle engine is still turn-based, Square has made an effort to rework it. Not only can characters combine their powers to create a super attack, but their opponent's position on the screen is now also important. In comparison, though, *Chrono Trigger* is more lightweight than *Final Fantasy*. But for SNES owners bitten by the RPG bug, it's a welcome oasis in the barren wasteland of translated Japanese RPGs. With Square producing games on Nintendo's 16bit machine, owners can feel justifiably smug in the face of next generation competition.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Yoshi's Island

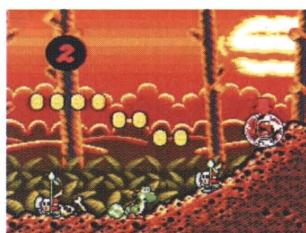
Format: SNES Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1995

Reviewed in E26

The essential elements of the *Super Mario* gameplay remain unchanged in *Yoshi's Island*. The two-button run 'n' jump control mechanics with which *Super Mario Bros.* defined the platform genre are intact. There are still coins to collect, enemies can still be destroyed by a jump on the head, and the goal of the game is still to reach the end of each tortuous level.

But it's what has been added to *Yoshi's Island* that raises it above other platform games. First, there's Yoshi himself. Second billing in *Super Mario World* has given way to a starring role in the sequel, and his abilities are the starting point for the whole game. Most important is Yoshi's egg-laying power. Using his tongue, he can grab an enemy character and then swallow them. He then lays an egg that he can fire to take out other enemies or hit out-of-reach bonuses.

Everything in *Yoshi's Island* – from the placement of platforms to the endearing rough-edged graphical style – reveals an attention to detail that few games can match. Only the linear design will disappoint *Mario* veterans. That aside, *Yoshi's Island* is a welcome addition to the series – as playable, challenging and entertaining as the best of the *Mario* games.



In retrospect

This was Miyamoto's last best game before his magic touch failed him (only joking). It effectively combined all the elements which make an NCL title special: simple controls, imaginative level design, vibrant visuals and novel secrets for those prepared to look. Whether it is better than *Super Mario World* is still debatable, but the two games together easily stand as the pinnacle of 2D platform gaming excellence. No word of Yoshi's career continuing on GameCube has as yet been heard.



The imaginative and beautifully detailed levels in *Yoshi's Island* make great use of the SNES' colour palette and give the game a unique look. Complete the game 100% and two new levels become available

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Sega Rally

Format: Saturn | Publisher: Sega | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 1996

Reviewed in E29

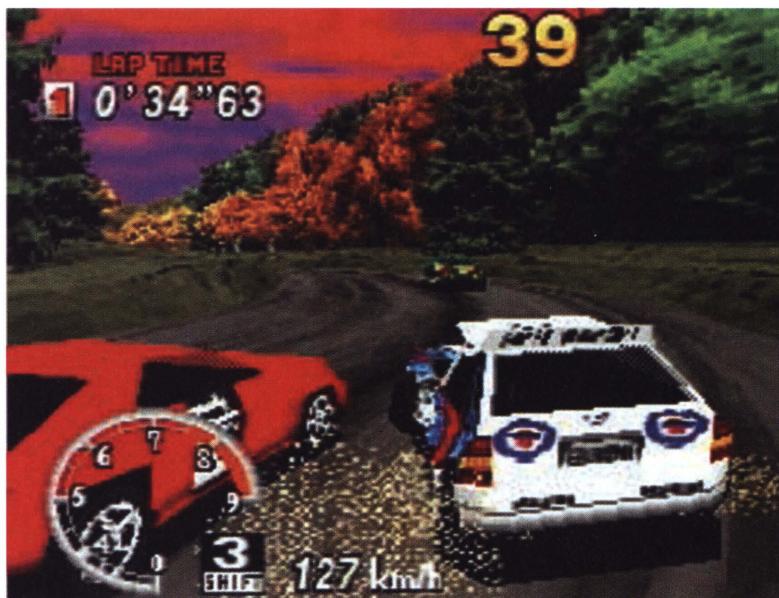
On the face of it, *Sega Rally* offers nothing extraordinarily new. But, as the title suggests, it moves out of that stereotypical urban sprawl, where circuits snake through skyscrapers and beneath overpasses. Instead, the four courses on offer here take in a variety of rough country terrains including treacherous mountain passes and muddy forest tracks.

This isn't just a cosmetic change, as it so easily could have been. These tracks really are rough and demand a totally different style of driving from the smooth tarmac of the city racers. *Sega Rally* actually feels like a physically demanding game to play. Often you find yourself fighting with the controls to get the car to stay on the track since it handles in such a determinedly bouncy way. The interaction between player, car and circuit is a constant, frantic skirmish, but it feels realistic and is incredible fun.

Sega Rally is a victory on a number of levels. Even though it runs at half the coin-op's frame rate, this conversion captures the whole energy, look and feeling of the original. Furthermore, put this side by side with the Saturn *Daytona* conversion and it's hard to believe they're running on the same machine.



Edge rating: Eight out of ten



Sega Rally offers some intense high-speed skirmishes – whether hurtling through a claustrophobic forest pass, or pelting along the open roadways of the gloriously autumnal bonus track, Lakeside



In retrospect

Play *Sega Rally* now and you might be appalled – not by the graphics or handling characteristics (which remain superbly 'slippery') but by how short lived the experience is. Arcade mode will probably take an hour, Championship an afternoon. It was a worthy port of the arcade original, however, especially for Saturn owners who were already wondering what had happened to all the good games Sega had promised them.

Virtua Cop

Format: Saturn | Publisher: Sega | Developer: AM2 | Origin: Japan | Date: 1996

Reviewed in E29



By using pre-calculated geometry, *Virtua Cop* enables the Saturn to produce super-smooth, wonderfully texture-mapped 3D scenery. However, this linear approach rather limits gameplay opportunities



In retrospect

The *Virtua* prefix has lost its sting in these post-headset times, but in '95 the first-person perspective and clean polygonal villains offered by *Virtua Cop* were as close as games came to realism. The dynamic wasn't new then, though the targets that illustrated when enemies were about to fire provided some innovation, but Edge's review tells another tale: it could be applied almost word for word to *Time Crisis II*, *Virtua Cop*'s modern day equivalent. Still, at least it was right: the genre's hardly the most sophisticated in terms of design, but it's compulsive, and great fun.

Virtua Cop wears its simplicity on its sleeve. Simply point the gun at the screen and shoot the polygonal bad guys – the only thing the player has to worry about is accidentally taking out a dockworker or secretary and instantly forfeiting a life. This is a game that is constantly trying to find new ways to force error from the player. Patterns of enemy behaviour are often established, tricking the player into habitually firing into certain sections of the screen at certain intervals, only for the pattern to be changed and a civilian to pop up in place of a gun-toting terrorist.

The graphical style of V-Cop can rarely be faulted. Glitch-free polygons and crisp texture maps combine to create a pleasingly sharp cartoon environment. Unfortunately, it doesn't offer much in terms of longevity; with the default number of Continues, it is possible to complete the game within a few hours.

But what V-Cop lacks in brain cells, it makes up for in unsophisticated compulsion. Through its use of movie set pieces and enemy types, it becomes sheer violent mayhem, which engages the mind on no other level than the need to distinguish legitimate targets. In other words, it's great fun.

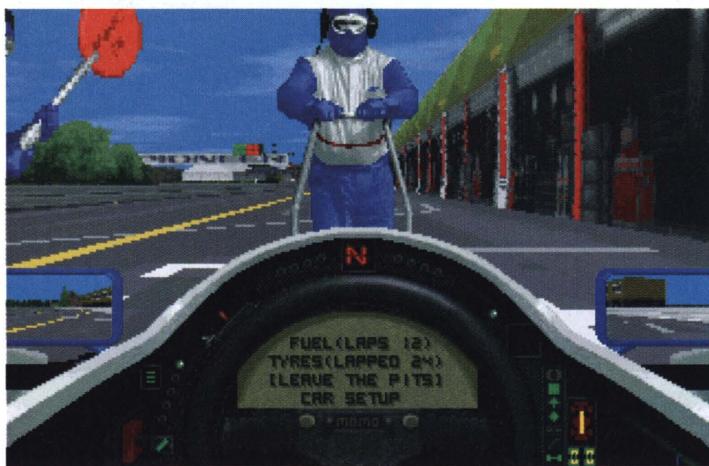
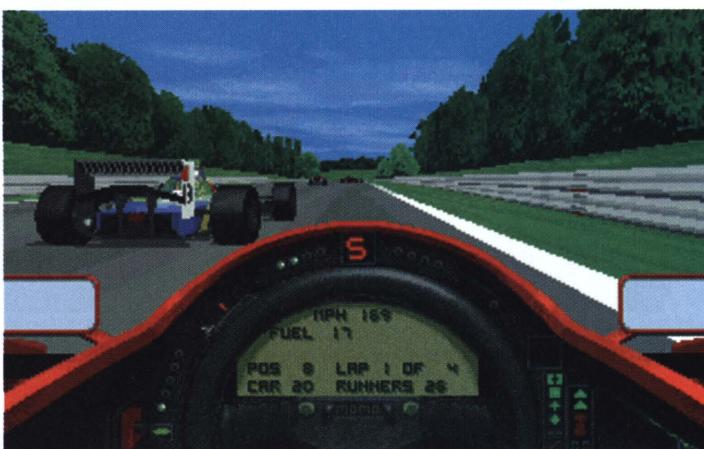
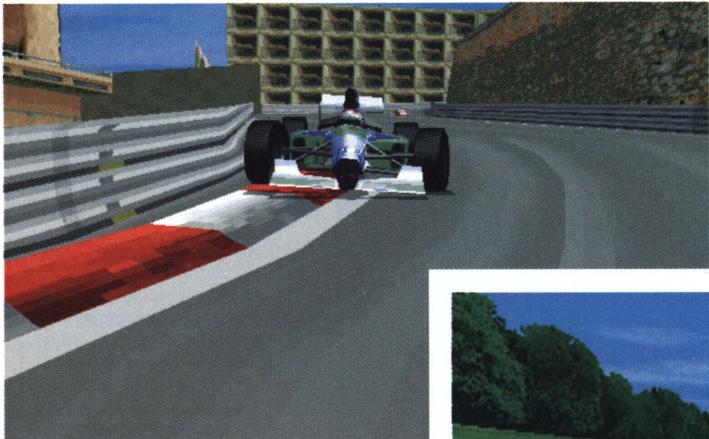
Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Formula One Grand Prix 2

Format: PC Publisher: MicroProse Developer: Geoff Crammond Origin: UK Date: 1996

Reviewed in E31



Monaco (top right) is the most texture-laden track but despite this the game only slows down when there are a couple of cars up close with the sun glinting off them



In retrospect

Like Jeff Minter, news that bedroom coding was dead never reached the ears of Geoff Crammond. The one-man programming machine followed his own remarkable *Formula One Grand Prix* with this, the most staggeringly comprehensive – and playable – F1 sim the gaming world had seen at the time (although weather effects never made the final version). It remained the reference for years, unchallenged – not necessarily because nothing else came close to it, though. Rather, no one was actually daft enough to try.

Edge has pondered whether Geoff Crammond is capable of making a bad game. The answer still appears to be 'no'. His list of successes forms an integral part of videogame history: from his debut title *Revs* to *The Sentinel*, *Stunt Car Racer* and *Formula One Grand Prix* he has married technical excellence with awesome playability. His latest title, *Grand Prix 2* continues the pedigree line.

F1GP2 has the fastest polygon engine that currently exists on the PC. On the Monaco circuit, for example the entire screen is frequently sharply textured with buildings obscuring the sky. The tarmac changes colour as you enter re-designed areas of Silverstone; individual cones sit exactly where they should at Spa, and tyre walls start and end in the right place at Monza. The attention to detail is astonishing and the assembler engine copes beautifully with the extra workload.

But it's when you get behind the wheel that the exceptional nature of *GP2* becomes apparent. Although a simulation through and through, this does not preclude the great enjoyment from simply belting round like an arcade game. The AI of the CPU-controlled cars has been improved – the backmarkers now jostle for position more fiercely. Cars can also experience a number of mechanical problems including flat tyres, gearbox and engine trouble and although they generally don't come into play they all make the last few laps that much more tense.

F1GP was famed for its user-friendliness and this sequel features adjustable damage settings, automatic gears, automatic brakes and an option that plots the optimum driving line on the track. The one factor that caps all this excellence is the handling of the car itself. From the wheels spinning on the grid, through skidding into corners, to the ploughing through sand traps, the car always feels attached to the road and never loses the sense of control lost. Add to this qualifying sessions, pitstops and all manner of tweaking, and *GP2* becomes a huge driving challenge.

It's almost impossible to list all *GP2*'s unique features. With each race there is something different to spot, unexpected computer car behaviour keeps experts on their toes, and just the plain satisfaction of driving the car round and round. Geoff Crammond has pleased everyone waiting for this game, and with it has resoundingly reaffirmed his status as the world's premier, and perhaps last, lone coder.

Screaming past the pit lane at Silverstone (left). *GP2* marks a significant advance on its predecessor but some of the new features will take weeks to discover and fully appreciate

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Civilization II

Format: PC Publisher: MicroProse Developer: In-house Origin: US Date: 1996

Reviewed in E32

Adored by PC owners worldwide, Sid Meier's *Civilization* was indisputably a masterpiece. Never before had a game offered such depth, diversity and longevity. Never before, and, some said, never again. But *Civilization II* manages to take its predecessor's sturdy foundations and fashion a game around them that overshadows the original in every way – without any major changes to the addictive gameplay. It's quite simply an astonishing achievement.

The new, improved graphics are inevitably the first thing players will notice about *Civilization II*. A marvellously detailed isometric world map replaces the old 2D display and the game benefits much as a result. Ground features such as hills and plains are clearer and more conspicuous, and the whole thing just looks more interesting in this new angle. There's also a useful zoom function, allowing the player to get up close in battle situations, but move out to consider great expanses of the map if the time has come to find a new corner to conquer.

But this is just the beginning of the story. Hiding beneath the aesthetic improvements are hundreds of gameplay additions that are way too numerous to go into in any great depth. Most importantly, dozens of new military units, scientific discoveries, civic improvements and wonders of the world have been added to the basic *Civilization* inventory, meaning even veterans of the original will have a lot to learn in this detailed new world. And as well as adding brand new features, elements retained from the original have often been altered to bring them into line with the complexity of the new world. Others, such as the diplomacy aspect, have been expanded and improved.

Despite the title's general excellence, there are, of course, dozens more things the designers could have done with *Civilization II* (a complex UN option would have been good, as would the ability to make lots of money quickly, in illegal ways), but they had to draw the line somewhere. Luckily they've drawn it at the point where the game isn't a pointlessly radical departure from the original, but is still a significant improvement.

For a long-term challenge that changes every time a game is begun, *Civilization II* cannot be more highly recommended. Even for those who can finish *Civilization* on its highest skill level, there will be enough here to rekindle their interest.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Each of these people represents a facet of the player's government. Elvis makes a marvellous MP

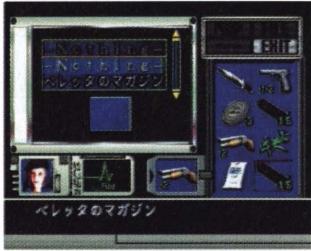
In retrospect

The videogame medium is large enough to contain multitudes. For every quick fix arcade beat 'em up there is a correspondingly cerebral pursuit.

Civilization II has only just been eclipsed by a sequel, and still provides hours of absorbing, highbrow, tactical interplay. It resolutely refuses to be ousted by successive generations of realtime upstarts, justifiably resting on laurels crafted from the finest, most languorous, strategic gameplay. It's an achievement that deserves to stand the test of time.

Resident Evil

Format: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: In-house ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 1996



Behind the next-generation graphics lies a game with its roots firmly planted in the past, with classical puzzles and traps

The fervid anticipation that has swelled around *Resident Evil* (known as *Biohazard* in Japan) has mixed implications for the PlayStation. Anything that generates this sort of word is surely welcome and yet at the same time there is a neediness to the enthusiasm that should give Sony pause. The PlayStation had a weak Christmas line-up and since then, despite a handful of worthy efforts, there's been a steady dribble of mediocrity. With Sega biting back and the N64 now almost close enough to be worth holding onto your cash for, Sony needs to deliver some pretty hot stuff pretty damn soon if it's to maintain momentum. Fortunately for it, and for gamers across the globe, *Resident Evil* delivers in spades.

Doubtless the reader will already be glancing agape at the screenshots that accompany this review and, let it be known, what you see is what you get. *Resident Evil* is *Alone In The Dark* directed by George A Romero with the design sensibilities of *Myst*. An enormous, implausibly beautiful arcade adventure, designed with the express purpose of frightening the player to the point of nappy-changing while inviting them to commit acts of unbridled violence against the enemy. You wouldn't ask for more if you rubbed your PlayStation and produced the game genie himself.

To enter Capcom's 'world of survival horror', the player takes control of one of two soldiers, Chris Redfield or Jill Valentine, both members of STARS (Special Tactics and Rescue Services) an SAS-type unit who become stranded in a vast mansion while investigating reports of genetic mutations roaming the countryside. Two things become immediately apparent on arrival: the source of



Capcom's horror survival game is a clever mixture of static, prerendered backdrops, combined with animated polygonal characters. Dynamic, cinematic camera angles complete the effect

backgrounds. The effect is startling. Such is the sophistication of the light-sourcing that wherever your character is and however flamboyant the light and shadow effects of the scenery are, you never look incongruous. Moreover, the polygon animation is splendidly fluid and realistic, allowing for precise, confident control of the player character and alarmingly believable movement on the part of your foes, be they zombies, werewolves or Fiat Cinquecento-sized spiders.

Progressing through the mansion is a tense and exhausting business. Capcom hasn't coined this new genre 'survival horror' for nothing

these abominations of nature is the house itself and the only way out is to solve the many traps and conundrums that obstruct your progress and blow away anything that moves. The scenario is familiar enough. The implementation is far from it.

Capcom has truly performed a miracle with this game. Chris and Jill, like all the characters in *Resident Evil*, are fully texture-mapped, light-sourced polygons operating in realtime within lavish prerendered

Progressing through the mansion and its environs is a tense and exhausting business. Capcom hasn't coined this new genre 'survival horror' for nothing. Half the puzzles, which range from the moronic to worthy of MENSA members, yield the simplest of all possible rewards: ammunition. There's been nothing in other games to compare to the panic and despair that you feel as you hammer shot after shot into an advancing zombie, taking off his arm and half his leg as

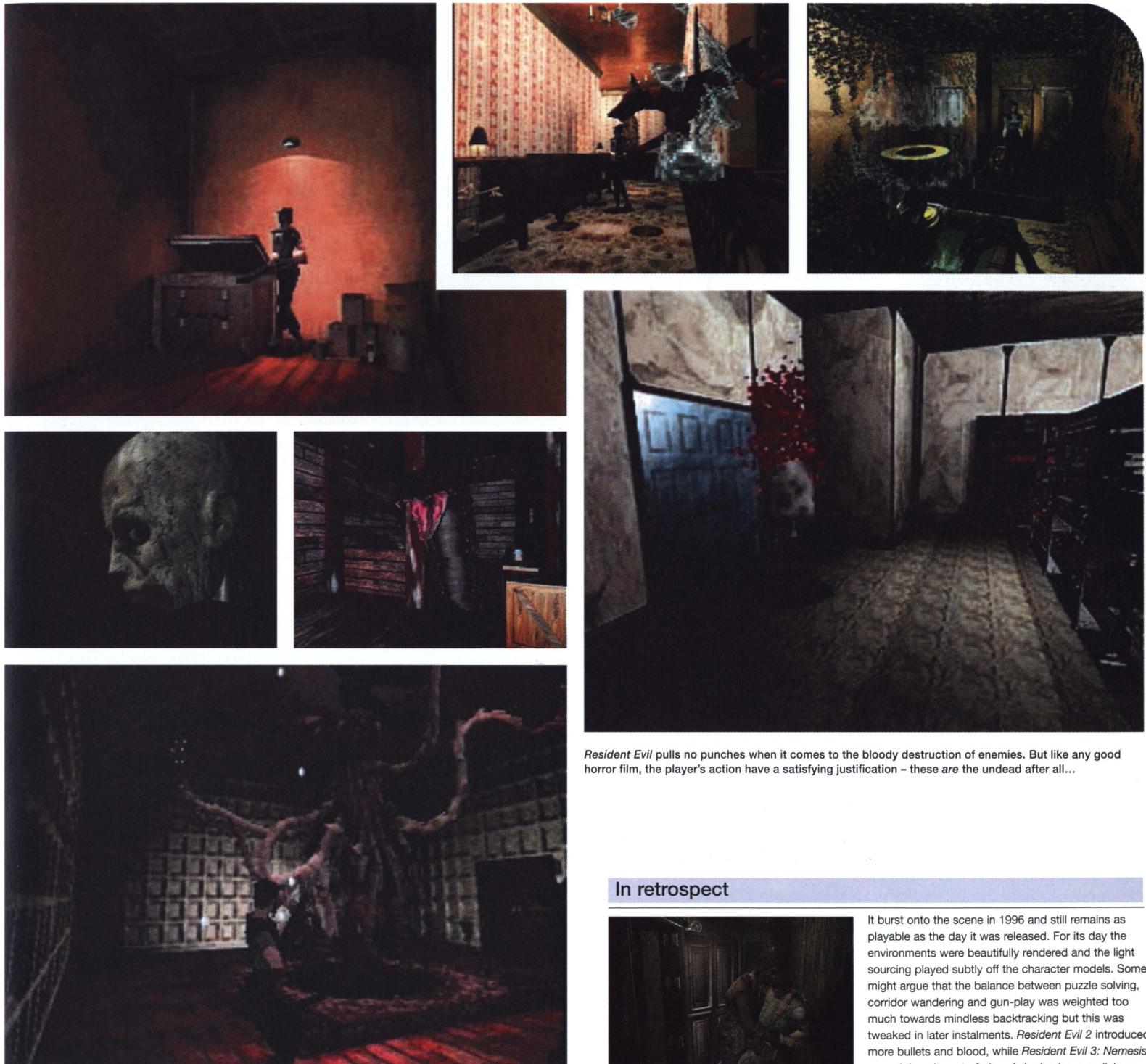
he lumbers forward, only to hear the dull click of an empty service revolver magazine. Fortunately, as well as increasingly appalling creatures, exploration brings some hefty guns including a shotgun and a bazooka. 'So what are you gonna do now, huh?', you cry triumphantly as chunks of smoking zombie spatter the room.

Everything in *Resident Evil* is geared towards suspense: the skewed camera angles, the haunting strains of the soundtrack, the fact that you can run forwards but only retreat in painfully slow steps. In fact, the only blemish on an otherwise stainless product (apart from some acting in the cut-away sequences to make the cast of 'Hollyoaks' blush) is the difficulty level. Suspenseful though it may be, it can be all too easy to loose off a couple of rash shots in an awkward position only to find yourself with your trousers round your ankles, your neck in the mouth of a flesh-eating ghoul, and your last save point about six rabid wolves and a snake away. Still, *Resident Evil* was never destined for the faint of heart. Where it is destined for, however, is the PlayStation pantheon.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Enemies come in all shapes and sizes. As the player progresses and the plot unfolds, the true horror of the *Resident Evil* story becomes clear, and the boss creatures become increasingly disturbing

Resident Evil pulls no punches when it comes to the bloody destruction of enemies. But like any good horror film, the player's actions have a satisfying justification – these are the undead after all...

In retrospect



It burst onto the scene in 1996 and still remains as playable as the day it was released. For its day the environments were beautifully rendered and the light sourcing played subtly off the character models. Some might argue that the balance between puzzle solving, corridor wandering and gun-play was weighted too much towards mindless backtracking but this was tweaked in later instalments. *Resident Evil 2* introduced more bullets and blood, while *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* scared the wits out of players by having a malicious character stalk the player. The series is soon to re-emerge on GameCube (pictured left) in early 2002.

Super Mario 64

Format: N64 ■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: In-house ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 1996

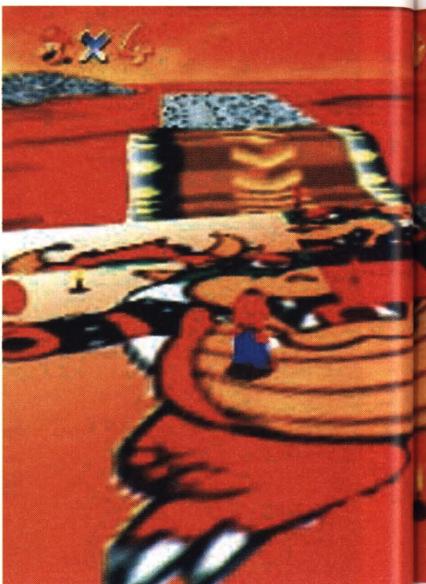


Though far from epic in scale, *SM64* manages to eke additional gameplay from each level by tasking the player with a series of challenging sub-quests

If Nintendo aimed to set itself a tough task, choosing to make the first Nintendo 64 title a continuation of the most legendary series of videogames in history must surely rank as the most demanding one imaginable. Mario's lineage, after all, is a concertedly two-dimensional one, and hardly ideal material upon which to base what was destined to be the most intensely scrutinised 3D videogame of all time.

At a time when the PC gaming fraternity is getting its thrills from guns, guts and gore from the likes of Quake, Nintendo is working at the other end of the spectrum, expounding on the overtly jolly themes that has made it the biggest videogame company in the world. But any preconceptions about this being a game purely for kids are quickly discarded. True, *SM64*'s presentation doesn't sit comfortably alongside the likes of '90s new-breed games such as *Wipeout*. But videogames exist to entertain, whether they come drenched in Designers Republic imagery or gaudy, toytown-like colour schemes; whether their soundtracks feature full-on Chemical Brothers arrangements or disposable plink-plonk lift muzak.

The moment the game hands control of Mario over to the player, an experience of discovery begins. With over 20 actions to experiment with in the opening environment (a grassy area dotted with trees, populated by birds and butterflies, and flanked by a beach), the temptation to simply toy with the controls without achieving anything in particular is overwhelming. Along with simple punches and kicks effected with simple stabs of the attack button, it's possible to pull off sliding attacks, foot sweeps and bottom bounces (reminiscent of those in *Yoshi's Island*). The lure to experiment turns out to be a fortunate one, as familiarity with how Mario



For Nintendo's first, true foray into the world of 3D gaming, *Super Mario 64* is little less than a work of genius. The solidity of its world, and the breadth of the quest are often breathtaking

throw and Mario runs) is not really where any difficulties occur, as Nintendo's new joypad technology performs excellently – it's the way the action is viewed that takes some getting used to. The game camera moves on its own accord almost constantly, with the intention of presenting what's happening onscreen to the optimum efficiency. This means that you rarely get to approach a challenge from a viewpoint that you're accustomed to, and will involve frequent frustration as you attempt to run across a narrow gangplank between two floating islands, or across a thin bridge spanning a rushing subterranean river.

Considering *SM64*'s 64-megabit cartridge format, the scale and variety of its content is astonishing. Consisting of 15 courses – each a sprawling world in itself – there are countless secret areas and bonuses to discover, in the true Mario tradition. Your quest will take you over ice-covered mountains, around sand-ridden pyramids and through murky oceanic depths, encountering old and new foes, and old and new challenges along the way. Each new level surprises and amazes in its design, and each is a thrilling experience in itself.

SM64's graphics are the most magnificent ever seen on a home system. Shigeru Miyamoto's dream of producing something more akin to an interactive cartoon than a videogame has been realised

to a remarkable degree: at times it's almost as much fun to sit back and watch someone else play *SM64* as it is to be playing it yourself. Animation is extravagant, textures are lavish, and even the most superfluous touches are rendered with the kind of detail that any developer other than Nintendo would not even consider implementing.

SM64 puts Nintendo's much-publicised preference of 'silicon over optical' storage to the test, and the results are pleasing. Its flow is seamless – moving from the main game area (the castle) into one of the areas that adjoin it is instantaneous, with no delays for loading or decompression in evidence. *SM64* may remind PlayStation and Saturn owners, long accustomed to loading waits, just how console gaming used to (and, Nintendo would argue, should) be: immediate.

The premier N64 game ably vindicates the delay imposed upon the machine's release by Shigeru Miyamoto and his team of designers. It's a fact that few videogames delight in the way a Nintendo game can, but no Nintendo game you've ever seen is nearly as delightful as this new 64bit breed.

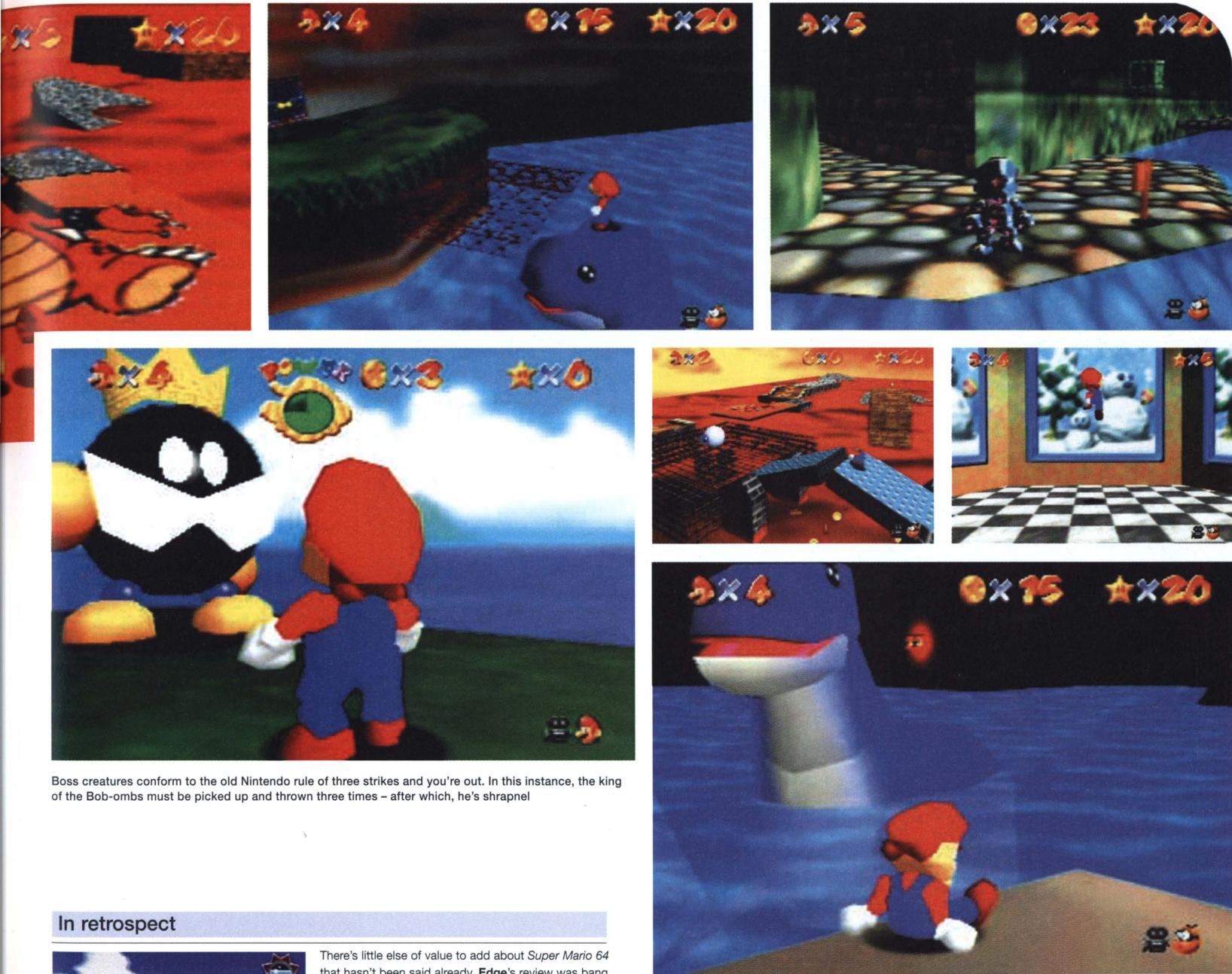
The world of videogaming has just changed forever. The prospect of what Nintendo can deliver further down the line truly boggles the mind.



Videogaming has just changed forever. The prospect of what Nintendo can deliver further down the line truly boggles the mind

behaves and performs is essential – unlike previous Mario games, where skills picked up in one could be easily applied to another, there is little you can bring to *SM64* apart from the willingness to learn.

This fact makes it initially less accessible than any other Mario title. Getting to grips with its analogue control method (jig the stick slightly and Mario tiptoes; push it to its full



Boss creatures conform to the old Nintendo rule of three strikes and you're out. In this instance, the king of the Bobombs must be picked up and thrown three times – after which, he's shrapnel

In retrospect



There's little else of value to add about *Super Mario 64* that hasn't been said already. **Edge**'s review was bang on, and the game has stood the test of time amazingly well. Its longevity is probably due, in part, to the simple, cartoon-style graphics, which require neither updating, nor a higher resolution to compete with the latest games. N64 owners will no doubt dust off their machines in years to come, shove *SM64* into the slot and (assuming the back-up battery hasn't run out) either continue where they left off, or start the whole amazing adventure all over again. We naturally await *GameCube Mario Sunshine* (left) with bated breath...

Mario has to call upon the help of others – like Nessie here – to complete his various tasks. Levels are accessed by jumping into paintings (above), which ripple realistically as Mario passes through

NiGHTS

Format: Saturn Publisher: Sega Developer: Sonic Team Origin: Japan Date: 1996

Reviewed in E36



Only by memorising courses can the player build up links of significant length, needed to progress

In retrospect

It never really stood a chance. Cruelly pitched by the release schedules against Miyamoto's new masterpiece *Mario 64*, *NiGHTS* could only lose. While innovative elements, a dreamy atmosphere and time sensitive easter eggs galore attracted a passionate hardcore following, the gaming public were bemused by the strictly mediated on-rails flying, odd structure and deeply, deeply disappointing roaming sections. A beguiling experience, to be sure, but ultimately an unfulfilling one that completely failed to replace Sonic as Sega's killer home franchise.



Coded by the same in-house team responsible for the *Sonic* games, *NiGHTS* clearly shares graphical nuances. Though 'next-gen' in scope, the old level-Boss structure is still in evidence

With the Saturn, Sega has been fighting the new enemy, Sony, and up until now the battle has been notable by the absence of mascots. *NiGHTS* may be an attempt to bolster the public perception of its new(ish) machine, and provide a firm selling handle for the console in its continuing struggle against the PlayStation. Additionally, Sega has nine months before Nintendo re-enters the fray. An older, established user-base was the advantage Sega held in the days of Sonic, and it's what it really has got to aim for now.

NiGHTS is without doubt the most original and (with the possible exception of *VF2* and *Sega Rally*) visually dazzling title seen on the Saturn to date. Set in a selection of 'dream worlds' the player can either walk ground-based characters around with complete freedom or fly with impressive speed over four set routes per level. The combination of low-clipping 3D terrain (all impressively texture mapped), speed (unrivalled in a platform game on any of the next generation consoles) and some almost drug-induced moments, has the heads of even the most cynical turning to have a look.

The story behind the game is intrinsic to the structure of the title. Two children, Elliot Edwards and Claris Sinclair are having nightmares. In their dreams they get transported to worlds, partly created by them, to have their wisdom, hope, intelligence, and purity stolen by the head of the evil world, Wizeman. With the help of *NiGHTS* (one of Wizeman's rebellious evil spirits) they must get these four attributes back, travel through the dream worlds and finally defeat Wizeman.

Although *NiGHTS* has superficially simple 'collecting things' gameplay, in reality it's more complicated. Each child has only four dream worlds to complete, with a boss at the end and Wizeman as the finale to the fourth. It does not take long to get access to all areas in what in all honesty must be called a fairly small game. *NiGHTS* is a disappointment in other respects, too. *Sonic* was a very focused game with a clear aim, making it easy to pick up and play. By contrast, a lot of the time *NiGHTS* feels as if its gameplay has been made to fit within a set of technological displays of competence – selling points for the Saturn around which a game has been fitted.

NiGHTS is an enigmatic game that the public might take to their hearts or might reject out of hand. Either way, it's not quite enough to be an all-time classic.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

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Ver.2



Broken Sword

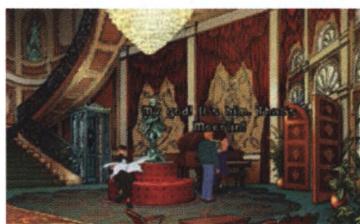
Format: PC Publisher: VIE Developer: Revolution Origin: UK Date: 1996

Reviewed in E37

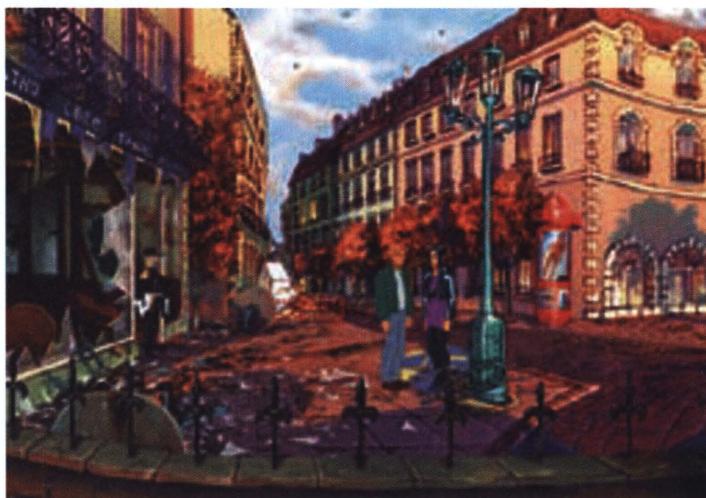


In retrospect

Amazingly, *Broken Sword* so captivated one games journalist that she decided to write a book on its inspiration, the Knights Templar (it's currently still in production). Although lying strictly within the boundaries of a well-worn genre, *Broken Sword* was more than just another point 'n' click adventure: it took the art of interactive storytelling to new levels, and, in truth, it hasn't been bettered since. With a third in the series finally confirmed, and GBA conversions of the first two outings also on the way, Revolution may prove again that, as *Edge* put it in the review, there are few things more satisfying than a good story well told.



The SVGA artwork in *Broken Sword* by far exceeds the competition in games of this genre



As the game opens, American George Stobbard is recovering from witnessing the destruction of a Paris bistro. It's not long before his mind has something less threatening to focus on

The mythic rivalry between UK and US developers has never been more obvious than in the genre of graphic adventures. The British have spent the last few years playing a game of catch-up, in particular attempting to emulate the careful narratives and classy presentation value of LucasArts' efforts. With *Broken Sword* the tables have at last been turned. For with this, its third attempt at a point-and-click adventure game, York-based Revolution Software has finally escaped the shadow of *Monkey Island* and taken the graphic adventure to new levels, in terms of both story and spectacle.

In building its trans-European plot around the legends of the Knights Templar, *Broken Sword* appears weighty without ever losing its sense of pace. The undiscovered treasure of this Crusades-era order of monks acts as the McGuffin, but around this portentous starting point a comedic series of episodes have been crafted, enabling the game to focus on a large amount of character interaction and action-movie situations. Many of which would fit well in an Indiana Jones flick, in fact.

Animated cartoons have been used as the graphical reference point, and the game features some of the most lively sprites ever. Whereas previous LucasArts efforts such as *The Dig* suffered at the hands of low-resolution pixelation, the clean SVGA images of *Broken Sword* possess great fluidity and style, with keen use of sound effects and voice treatments furthering the filmic level of quality. Its movie aspirations also stretch to fully animated cut-scenes that, through their exciting content, never interrupt the flow.

Undoubtedly however, it's the smooth control interface and satisfying scriptwork which consolidate *Broken Sword*'s position as a new milestone in adventure gaming. While *Broken Sword* in no way breaks from the accepted boundaries of the traditional form of graphic adventure, it remains a triumph of inventive, witty scripting and near faultless presentation techniques.

Certainly, the attempt to apply comedy to what is a detective-cum-action scenario isn't always successful. And, with its reliance on accepted control systems, *Broken Sword* represents a distillation of standard practices more than a new breed of adventure game. Nevertheless, Revolution's latest merits the accolade of best graphic adventure to date and proves there are few things more satisfying than a good story well told.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Crash Bandicoot

Format: PlayStation | Publisher: SCEA | Developer: Naughty Dog | Origin: US | Date: 1996

Reviewed in E39

Crash Bandicoot, for all its 3D trickery and 32bit sheen, is still firmly rooted in the land of the traditional left-to-right platformer. A moving platform to leap to, an enemy to avoid and a bonus crate to jump upon are not the ingredients of innovation the title seems to promise.

Gameplay is split into three distinct styles. Running into and out of the screen are the most innovative and afford Crash its most distinctive feature. The more traditional side-on sections make far less use of the 3D effect. There are some levels that combine all three formats. Breaking up the 'die once – learn the pattern' gameplay are a mine-cart ride, a breakneck race on a hog's back and avoiding being crushed by an Indiana Jones-style boulder. In the main, however, you'll be utilising Crash's armoury of dodging, jumping and spinning on the last level in exactly the same manner as you did on the first.

The attention to detail on the textures is nothing short of astonishing. Yet once you're past the admittedly amazing graphics, the gameplay can only be described as 'uneventful' and there isn't one revolutionary platforming idea on the whole CD.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten



Punctuating the right-left, up-down pseudo 3D platforming action are Crash's signature thirdperson stages. The game dynamic remains the same – all that's really changed is the player's perspective



In retrospect

Crash Bandicoot is the perennial kiddie-pleaser. While Mario and Sonic grew up to offer rewarding 3D gameplay for a wider audience, Crash was only ever targeted at pre-teens. In its favour, the bandicoot exudes cute charm but the gameplay has always remained 2D in a pseudo 3D environment. *Pandemonium* (above) pulled off a similar feat with even better visuals, but creatively, this form is a cul-de-sac in a more complex videogame landscape.

WaveRace 64

Format: N64 | Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 1996

Reviewed in E39



The Sunset Bay race takes place, naturally enough, at dusk, when the sea is coloured with the golden rays of the evening sun. Unfortunately, the PAL conversion contrived to make it look more like Sewage Bay



In retrospect

While Super Mario 64 was the N64 flagship in terms of gameplay, *WaveRace* was the standard bearer for its graphical prowess. Its realistic water and jet ski physics were only bettered with the recent appearance of its GameCube successor. On reflection, given the relatively limited supply of courses, and the aggravating difficulty curve, Edge's score errs on the high side. Though considering the lacklustre quality of latter-day water-borne racers (*Splashdown*, *Wave Rally*, *Blood Wake* et al) its importance as pioneer of the genre cannot be underestimated.

In some respects, *WaveRace* is close in look and feel to the Super FX-powered SNES title, *Stunt Race FX*. But instead of dinky off-road vehicles, the convincing designs and dynamics of Kawasaki jet skis make for a slightly more serious, although no less enjoyable gaming experience.

What gradually makes itself clear is that *WaveRace* has something that no other game has yet managed – thoroughly realistic water. It's evident that the majority of the machine's polygon horsepower has been put to use in modelling authentic waves. Having said that, there are some pretty memorable graphical moments that will impress even the pickiest player. One course, on a calm lake, starts off immersed in thick mist that gradually clears to reveal an impressive depth of vision and some lifelike reflections at the water's edge. Subtle touches like these heighten the player's immersion substantially.

Ultimately, *WaveRace* is a perfect example of how Nintendo's approach to game design remains markedly different from almost every other videogames company in the world. Sure, it's fast, powerful, good looking and pretty much state-of-the-art in most respects – but what matters most is that it's exceptional fun.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Tomb Raider

Format: PlayStation | Publisher: Eidos | Developer: Core Design | Origin: UK | Date: 1996



The variety in the design and texturing of *Tomb Raider's* various locations is eminently commendable

It is perhaps unfortunate that *Tomb Raider* has appeared now, several months after *Super Mario 64*. Even though the two games were created thousands of miles apart, Core Design has managed to create an experience more than slightly akin to – and containing many features of – what many see as the best game of all time. If *SM64* was still six months away, *Tomb Raider* would be hailed as one of the finest videogame experiences ever. But, while it may not be seen as redefining the videogame per se, it will certainly be seen to be pushing the 3D platformer towards a new level of excellence.

One of the reasons for its impact is the engrossing scenario and ambitious environments that appear in the game. The story centres on the adventures of Lara Croft, an upper-class lass whose plane crashes during her return from a skiing trip, forcing her to survive in the wilderness for several weeks. Upon returning to civilisation she has great trouble re-integrating with society so, making use of her newly acquired survival abilities, she embarks upon a life dedicated to uncovering ancient civilisations and writing travel guides based on her adventures.

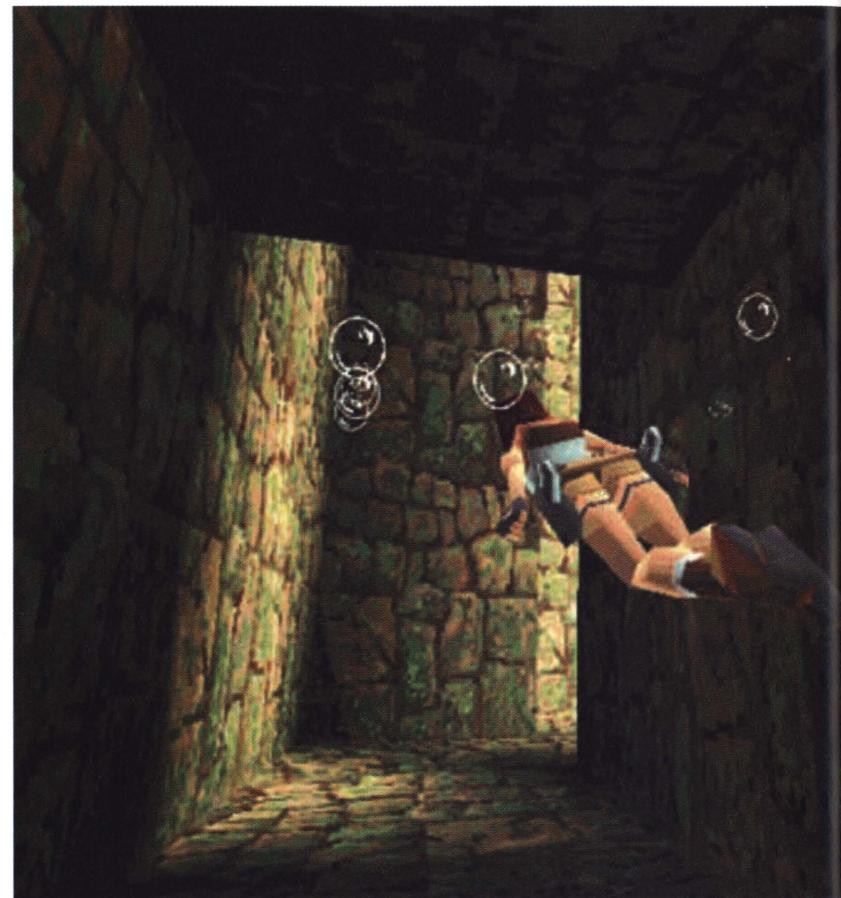
As she travels through the 15 chapters of the game, the story is filled in using entirely appropriate prerendered scenes which are not only magnificently cinematic, but also serve to build the atmosphere. Instead of casually flipping through each cut-scene, as is so commonly the case, each sequence will have the player watching avidly.

Tomb Raider's structure is fairly simplistic but this is by no means a criticism. As in many of the finest games, a limited number of clearly defined elements are repeatedly used to create a number of diverse environments and challenges that are at once surprising and consistently playable.

Tomb Raider is an exceptional game. Take out a few glitches and add a touch more action and it would be an almost perfect creation

Each level is made up of a location, a number of simple puzzles (the cracking of which often being anything but simple) and a selection of enemy encounters.

The game's locations are incredibly well modelled, the internal areas being particularly impressive, with vast structures of hallways, stairwells, claustrophobic chambers and massive, dramatic halls. The layout of these



The multi-talented Lara Croft can hold her breath for quite some time under water – but she's only human. Take too long exploring these submerged passageways, and she'll die a painful, watery death

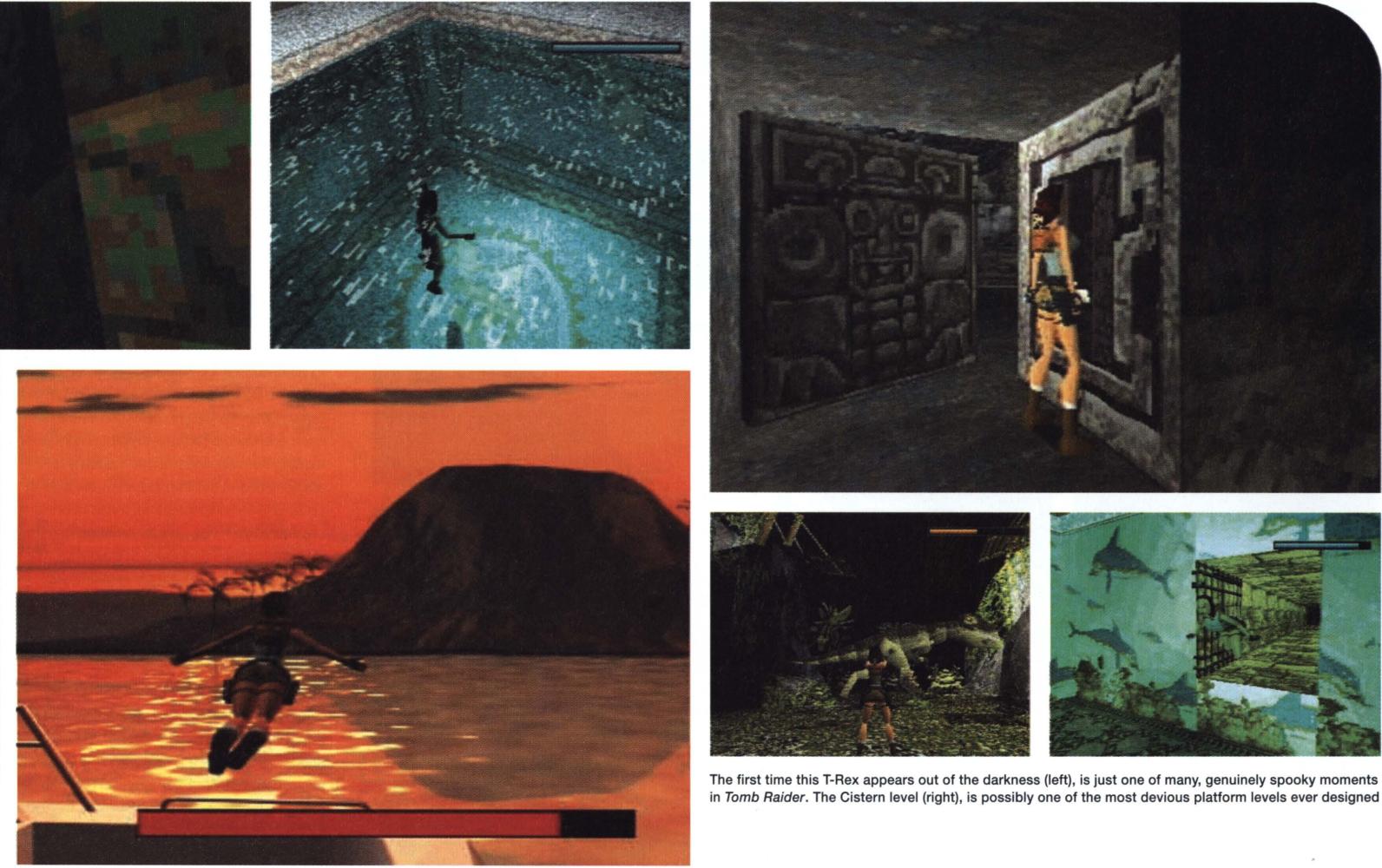
is expansive but never confusing; however large a building, it's always logically mapped out with rooms having only a limited number of exits. The feeling is that each part of a level has a very logical relationship with its surroundings, and as you play through it you learn how each room interconnects.

The puzzles are intelligently placed and well thought out: stimulating, but rarely frustrating. Typically, a puzzle will present an obvious exit that appears inaccessible. A number of elements come into play such as switches and moving platforms and it is up to the player to tinker with level elements until it's clear how they need to be manipulated.

Then there are the enemy encounters, which always crop up when least expected, adding excitement to sections that would otherwise be plain, and heightening the feeling of tension and urgency.

With all this so slickly implemented it would've been no surprise if a flawed control system spoiled the party, yet even this aspect of the game is soundly designed. Lara is the perfect heroine. Her acrobatic moves – jumps, long jumps, side steps, flips and wall-crawling abilities – are excellently animated and easily implemented using straightforward joypad combinations. They're also very accurately integrated into the game's environment so everything seems very realistic: you can tell when you'll be able to grab something or jump somewhere instinctively rather than just randomly trying things and hoping that they're what the game's designers intended you to do.

Criticisms of *Tomb Raider* are few yet worth noting. Graphically, it isn't without problems. Because of the clever camera system, which attempts to always provide



The first time this T-Rex appears out of the darkness (left), is just one of many, genuinely spooky moments in *Tomb Raider*. The Cistern level (right), is possibly one of the most devious platform levels ever designed

the optimum view, there are bound to be times when, like *Mario 64*, its performance falters, while those who only get off on fast, action-packed thrills may be disappointed that the game doesn't continually throw hordes of enemies at you, and that the puzzles are fairly sprawling in nature.

Given its 15 gigantic levels and richness and variety of gameplay, *Tomb Raider* is an exceptional game, and one that is better than anything Core has ever released by a large margin. Take out a few glitches and add a touch more action and it would be an almost perfect creation, but as an epic-scale adventure in its own right it is never anything less than totally captivating.



Sound effects are used sparingly, but effectively. This level, in particular, benefits from a limited draw distance, punctuated by the eery growls of unseen creatures



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

In retrospect



It would be too easy to say that the *Tomb Raider* series gradually paled because the format became familiar. Wrong. Looking back, Lara's first outing had better set pieces and more imaginative puzzles. The dinosaur encounter and the Midas' hand conundrum still remain standout moments. While controls and animation were tweaked for subsequent iterations the level design lacked inspiration. Though recreations of Venice (*Tomb Raider 2*) and Area 51 (*Tomb Raider 3*) were visually arresting, Core fell back on the pull-level-to-open-door formula too often. Lara's death (is she?, isn't she?) in *Tomb Raider 4* was something of a surprise, but another rushed version in time for Christmas 2000 (*Tomb Raider: Chronicles*) wasn't. The games will always sell, but many hope for a touch more imagination when Lara finally makes it onto PS2.

Mario Kart 64

Format: N64 Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1997

Reviewed in E42



Even when playing with three or four players (right), the game retains speed. There is a trade-off, though – a complete lack of CPU opponents



Mario Kart 64 takes the essence of the original, exploits the power of the N64 and brings fun back to racing. Much is familiar here – all eight of the drivers are *Mario* regulars, seven transferred straight from *Super Mario Kart* with Wario replacing the once-popular Koopa Trooper. The driving is basic, throwing out rev counters and gear changes in favour of simple press 'n' go acceleration. The accelerator and brake controls can be combined to perform a handbrake turn, while the joypad's trigger executes power-ups and its shoulder button skip-like jumps.

In terms of course design, the undulating landscapes are remarkably open, allowing you to drive outside of the tracks' confines, up roadside banks and over the surrounding terrain. Their variation is also worth noting – each one uses a different style of graphics, ranging from *Daytona*-esque roadway to stadium-based dirt track to snow-flanked icy path. Like the original game, these courses are littered with power-ups. Amongst the collection, green and red shells work as they did in the first, while multiple versions spin around your character to provide a shield before they're launched. Red mushrooms offer a turbo-like boost, banana skins cause other karts to lose traction, while spiky blue shells act like homing missiles.

Tactically, the game relies primarily on adept use of the different power-ups available and on mastery of the N64's analogue control stick. The karts are fairly forgiving and can really be thrown into corners without fear of losing control. This is a definite requirement, especially in the oneplayer Grand Prix mode, where the CPU competition cheats in order to keep up with your kart.

Ultimately, *Mario Kart 64* isn't quite the game that was hoped for. Its main fault is that it has only a handful of genuinely interesting tracks. It would seem that its designers spent longer working on some courses than they did others; the disappointing ones seem almost unfinished and dull by comparison. It would have been good, too, to see some more new power-ups rather than so many of the old ones return.

The multiplayer modes work a treat, though, and make it a must-have title for N64 owners who have access to plenty of joypads and friends. Plus, there are some gameplay skills that will take a while to master, ensuring the game a long lifespan.

In retrospect

Super Mario Kart was always going to be difficult to follow up. To those who succumbed to the delicate intricacies of the original's handling system, the greater emphasis on power-ups and track architecture was less than satisfactory. But to the generation that got its first taste of the franchise with the beefed up N64 version, the experience proved just as revelatory as its predecessor. Whatever your own predilections, it's clear that *Mario Kart 64* stood head and shoulders above the raft of inadequate karting clones spawned by the original.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Blast Corps

Format: N64 ■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Rare ■ Origin: UK ■ Date: 1997

■ Reviewed in E45

Blast Corps stands apart from every other videogame. It's a game without precedent; completely original. And that's one of the main reasons it's so good.

The shakily written plot has it that a nuclear missile carrier is blundering out of control across the world, and will explode if it hits anything. So the player, as a member of the International Rescue-style Blast Corps team, has to clear a path through the landscape for the carrier. This involves (a) bashing down any buildings that stand in its path, and (b) plugging gaps and holes along the route – a combined process that marks it out as something unlike anything else.

The isometric-style view can be rotated and zoomed in and out slightly, although it never quite seems to show as much of the playing area as you'd like. Across these destructible cityscapes trundle a varied bunch of vehicles, including a bulldozer, a frustratingly difficult-to-control dumper truck, a missile-equipped motorbike, some cars (which are purely for transport and timed bonus levels) and three robotic exoskeletons, one of which can fly. While countless games have offered opportunities to drive cars and fly spaceships, never before have players had the chance to play with life-size Tonka toys.

Most of the missions are simply a case of smashing down longer and longer rows of buildings, and you're increasingly limited to the feebler vehicles to make things harder. But two or three more puzzle-based missions are superbly designed, throwing in red herrings that'll stump you for ages, having you juggling vehicles confusedly and scurrying around the landscape in search of TNT crates. It's here that the carrier's relentless passage is most terrifying of all, as you clear a path almost to the end of a level, with plenty of time to spare, but then can't work how to get that one last building.

But, though finely polished, *Blast Corps* isn't perfect. There's some entertaining rescue missions, and a plethora of bonus levels, but these are all just the trimmings that are expected of the best Nintendo games. The guts of *Blast Corps*, the missions, run out just a little too soon for comfort.

It's a tremendously compelling game that has no equivalent on any other format, with graphics that are the envy of every PlayStation and Saturn owner. It's another much-needed feather in the N64's rather bald-looking cap.



Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



One of the more entertaining vehicles is this flying exoskeleton. Simply fly above a suitable skyscraper – and cut the power...

The red vehicle below is the missile carrier – the slightest contact detonates the nuclear warhead

In retrospect

The ability to thrill players by providing a platform for creation (*Sim City*, *Theme Park*, *Startopia*) is only matched by giving them the opportunity for wanton destruction. Enter *Blast Corps*, probably the most addictive game using demolition as a gameplay dynamic. The graphics are crusty by today's standards but the satisfaction of levelling huge buildings with monster machines is still captivating. As with many of Rare's inspired one-shots, it desperately needs a next-gen update.

GoldenEye

Format: N64 Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Rare Origin: UK Date: 1997

After the mock-up BBFC certification (which gives the game a '4' certificate for four-player action) and the rotating stainless steel Nintendo logo, the instantly recognisable Bond theme issues forth. As the opening credits introduce the cast, it is clear that this is going to be something special.

GoldenEye's 18 missions follow the plot of the film closely, with a certain amount of artistic licence employed in certain sections

The realistic setting, well-animated characters and interactive backgrounds combine to create a genuine sense of 'being there'



The missions see prospective agents undertaking tasks in underground Russian missile bases and neutralising satellite links in Siberia

to ensure that this firstperson shoot 'em up contains even more action than its filmic counterpart. As a result, the game's scenarios are as diverse as could be expected from any Bond adventure, seeing 007 bungee-jumping from a Russian dam, defusing bombs in Monte Carlo, infiltrating enemy installations, stealing secret weapons from Siberian bases, disabling enemy satellite communication in Cuba, meeting up with old adversaries and, of course, saving the girl.

For each mission, a number of objectives have to be completed in order to progress. The intrepid hero can make use of one of the many different weapons at his disposal, as well as timeless 007 gadgets such as his watch laser or magnet. At the beginning of a level, the player starts off with Bond's trusty Walther PPK, but shooting soldiers soon provides access to more powerful artillery, such as machine guns, grenade launchers, mines, and shotguns.

Furthermore – and unusually for this type of game – Rare has included a couple of features which would not be expected from a movie licence, one of which is the ability to hold a gun in each hand – an essential survival technique in some of the later levels. Running down one of the corridors in the Siberian computer base with two Russian Klobb sub-machine guns spraying enemy guards with bullets, is one of the game's many supremely satisfying moments.

The game's other novel twist is the ability to zoom in on potential targets when using the sniper rifle (one of the first weapons available), which allows the player to neutralise opponents quietly and efficiently from hundreds of metres away. This feature is particularly impressive when it is used to take out the soldiers patrolling the guard towers



on the dam at the end of the first mission, their utter helplessness underlining the beauty of such a form of attack.

However, what stands out most about *GoldenEye* is the depth of its atmosphere. The realistic setting, remarkably well-animated characters and interactive backgrounds combine to create a genuine sense of 'being there' which is rarely experienced in a videogame. Bullet holes pepper walls, lights can be shot out, shrapnel breaks nearby windows, smoke lingers momentarily after explosions, hats can be shot off enemies' heads, and characters react differently depending on where they're hit – shoot them in the head, for example, and they go down immediately, but more sadistic players can inflict harm on limbs several times before the injuries prove fatal.

In addition, enemy soldiers are intelligent, moving swiftly into any area where they sense gunfire action is afoot. Therefore, it's necessary to keep a low profile, destroying security cameras before they set off an alarm, something usually closely followed by an entire platoon of guards.

The soldiers also react differently – some roll along the ground while continuing to shoot; others crouch or come running

towards their target. **Edge** was particularly intrigued by the actions of one guard who suddenly decided to stop firing. It was only when it transpired that he was throwing a grenade that a panic-stricken attempt to escape the deadly object ensued.

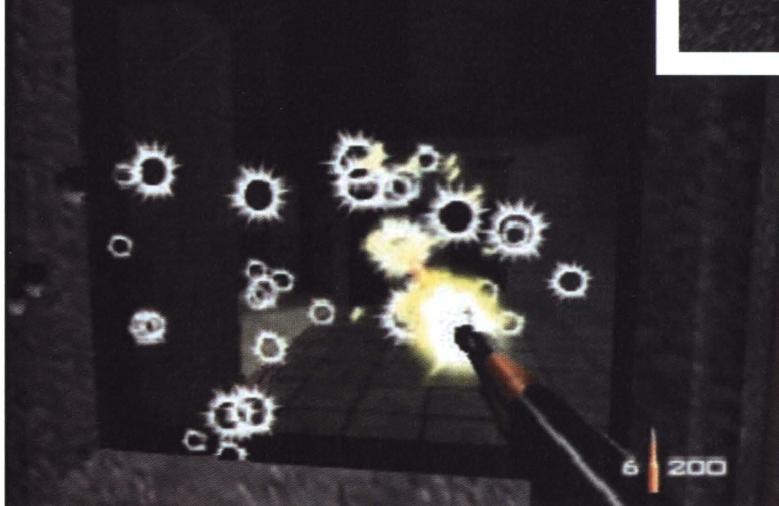
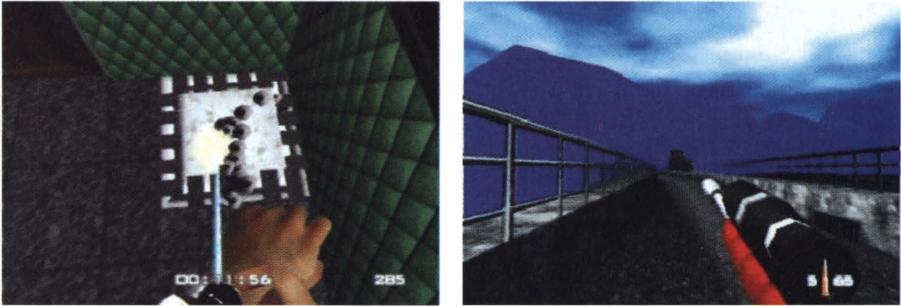
If all of this wasn't enough, Rare has included a hugely addictive multiplayer option to tempt two, three or four players. There are five scenarios here, ranging from a straightforward deathmatch to scenes inspired by films such as 'You Only Live Twice', where players have only two lives; 'The Man With the Golden Gun', in which one hit from eponymous weapon proves fatal, and 'The Living Daylights', essentially a flag tag game. Players can select a character from a list featuring some infamous Bond adversaries such as Jaws and Oddjob.

Further reinforcing Rare's reputation as the strongest independent N64 developer, *GoldenEye* slips the player into James Bond's hand-stitched leather shoes but fortunately discards with the tedium of those seemingly interminable MI6 lectures. It's a game sure to leave players shaken and most definitely stirred.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Bond's armoury includes his trusty laser watch (above left) and his Walther PPK. Killing enemy soldiers, however, earns extra weapons, such as the sniper rifle (above right), and ammunition

In retrospect



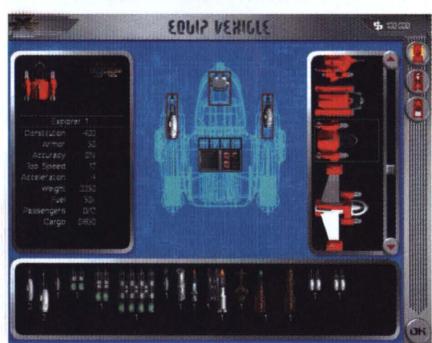
It was so close. A ten was considered, but eventually rejected. The game endures, of course, and for many is superior to its spiritual successor, *Perfect Dark* (left). The core elements were honed to perfection. Weapons fired convincingly, while enemies reacted with an unnerving believability. Nothing could match the sense of empowerment induced by *GoldenEye*'s weapon effects and character animation. The sniper rifle wasn't the first example of a zoom scope, but it's rarely been matched in terms of balance and efficacy. And that's before **Edge** gets onto the subject of multiplayer, which threatened many a deadline...

The scenery in *GoldenEye* is totally interactive – just about anything that could be shot in real life can be shot here. Later levels see the introduction of heavier artillery such as grenade launchers (above)

X-COM: Apocalypse

Format: PC Publisher: MicroProse Developer: Mythos Games Origin: UK Date: 1997

Reviewed in E48



The familiar isometric view is retained, although this latest iteration in the series offers a totally new combat system

In retrospect

The marriage of turn-based and realtime strategy elements featured in *X-COM: Apocalypse* proved to be a revealing sign of the times. Released in 1997, it arrived some two years after *Command & Conquer* had unwittingly precipitated the evolution of the strategy species, away from considered and cerebral rumination towards reflex action and quick mouse manoeuvring. The submission of one of the most prominent turn-based strategy franchises to the new market reality engendered by a sudden proliferation of RTS titles was the end of an era. Though turn-based titles still exist, few exhibit the panache of the X-COM series.

All of the X-COM games offer a similar level of control, from coordinating global operations right down to customising individual troop weaponry prior to each forthcoming skirmish

MicroProse's *UFO: Enemy Unknown* was one of those games that pops up, seemingly out of nowhere, and almost overnight becomes a classic. Set at the turn of the century during a wave of UFO sightings, its plot centred on a top-secret organisation called 'X-COM'. As the commander of this group, it was your job to investigate UFOs and protect the Earth from any threat they posed. Though far from visually stunning, *Enemy Unknown* was a triumph of gameplay over gloss, skilfully combining strategy and tactical combat into a seamless, addictive whole.

Fast forward several decades. The Earth's environment has all but collapsed in the wake of a second alien invasion (*X-COM: Terror From The Deep*), leaving much of the planet uninhabitable. However, technology has made huge leaps forward as a result of the two alien wars, allowing humanity to colonise the stars. A lone outpost is left on Earth in the form of a vast city called Mega-Primus.

As the game begins, inexplicable dimensional rifts have started to appear in the Mega-Primus megalopolis, through which strange new UFOs are appearing. Once again it's up to the player, as X-COM's commander, to discover exactly what these new aliens' intentions are and thwart them.

Apocalypse is two games in one. The first is the Cityscape, where the player builds and develops the X-COM base structure, hiring new staff, training agents, equipping vehicles, researching and manufacturing new technology. When the player encounters an alien threat, agents can be sent in, at which point the action switches to the second section, a tactical combat simulation in which troops are controlled in their efforts to kill or capture the invaders. Success allows the recovery of aliens (dead or alive), together with their weapons and equipment.

But the single biggest change lies in the tactical combat sections, which can now be played in either a turn-based mode, similar to the original games, or in realtime. It's no overstatement to say that this is one of the best tactical combat systems ever designed, offering all the advantages of realtime over turn-based systems without sacrificing any tactical detail. Combine this with the incredible depth and scope of the gameplay, a range of new ideas, and the same core appeal as the previous titles, and the result is a strategic masterpiece.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Jedi Knight

Format: PC Publisher: Virgin Developer: LucasArts Origin: US Date: 1997

Reviewed in E52

The 'Star Wars' saga provides the richest pickings for computer interpretations, yet LucasArts has only periodically succeeded in capturing the flavour of George Lucas' creation without compromising gameplay. *Jedi Knight* finally marries the two, using a powerful 3D engine and accelerator support to bring a host of familiar imagery to life.

Jedi Knight remains a wholly convincing experience, pushing the player smoothly into ever-more dangerous levels. And countless incidental details, such as the way dead bodies or hacked limbs slide down ledges or float with the flow of water, prove that the designers have a strong appreciation for the cinematic nature of the genre.

Rarely has the 'one more go' urge been tapped so effectively. Progress is rewarded with more impressive designs and set pieces, proving the enormity of the levels doesn't come at the expense of tight pacing or an appreciation for the splendour of the source material.

It may suffer in comparison to *Quake* because of that lack of polish, yet playing *Jedi Knight* is never anything less than thrilling. Yes, it may be a flawed diamond, but a few dumb moments never did the 'Star Wars' trilogy any harm.



Edge rating: Eight out of ten



In retrospect

As Edge's review of *Jedi Knight* pointed out, LucasArts hasn't always been successful in recreating the paradigmatic essence of the 'Star Wars' movies for games platforms. *Jedi Knight*, a sequel to the equally fine *Dark Forces* was undoubtedly one of the company's successes. Playing the game today, the underlying mechanics have clearly dated, but it remains an atmospheric tour de force. The good news is that there's a sequel in the works.

Blade Runner

Format: PC Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment Developer: Westwood Origin: US Date: 1997

Reviewed in E53



In retrospect

The point-and-click adventure was already on its way out of fashion when Westwood chose to invigorate the genre with a remarkable interpretation of a seminal movie licence. Though LucasArts continues to support the genre, and Revolution is currently planning to bring its *Broken Sword* series to a set top box near you, *Blade Runner* stood out from the rest thanks to its dynamic interactive plot and authentic noir atmosphere.

Although it hasn't suffered the volume of hyperbole usually reserved for titles of this importance, *Blade Runner* nevertheless has much to live up to. Not only have gamers been waiting for more than a decade for a faithful interpretation of the sci-fi classic, but Westwood's recent glories has also upped expectations to dizzying heights.

That the developer has opted for a point-and-click adventure structure comes as some relief. Certainly this is a title packed to bursting with rendered cut-scenes, most recreating the scenes from the big screen with astonishing accuracy. But they are by no means the highlight here. Rather it's the strength of the scripting, the power of the realtime graphics engine, and the constant mirroring of themes from the movie that firmly establish *Blade Runner* as a cutting-edge experience.

Ultimately, *Blade Runner* gets it right where it matters, in the level of tension, enjoyment and satisfaction it delivers. And crucially the game deviates far from the normal adventure, focusing on detective work rather than clichéd puzzle solving. As befits its name, this is a cutting edge piece of software as well as a stunning slice of pseudo-film noir.

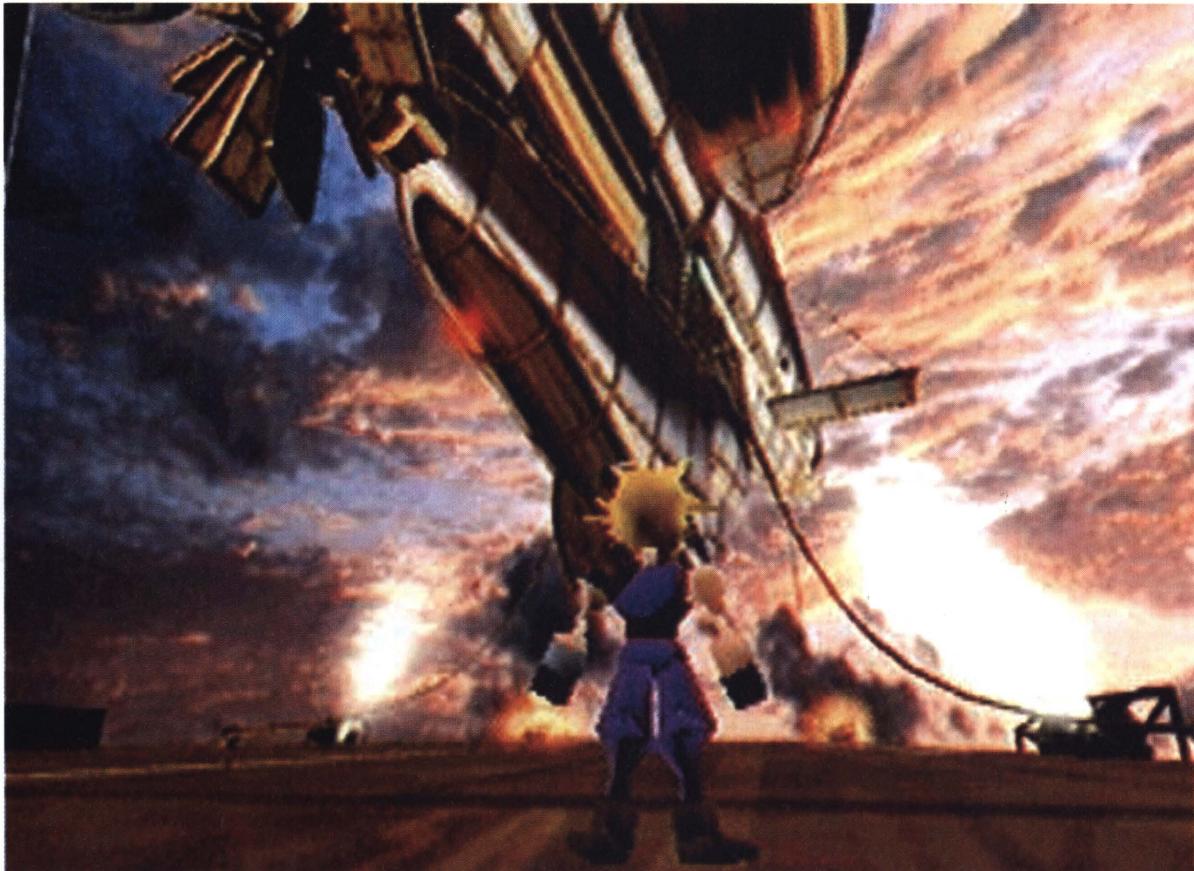
The nature of the characters' generation means they can look a tad rough up close – but perfectly presentable when viewed from these distances. The backgrounds, meanwhile, are magnificent

Final Fantasy VII

Format: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Squaresoft ■ Developer: In-house ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 1997



The FMV interludes slip seamlessly into the action, and are of top quality



Never a company to miss a marketing opportunity, SquareSoft has capitalised on the minor differences between the Japanese and US versions of *FFVII* and will release a version called *FFVII International*

While most Japanese RPGs have been happy to adopt an if-it's-not-broken-don't-fix-it attitude in bringing their titles across from the 16bit days, *Final Fantasy VII* has divorced itself almost entirely from its predecessors and tipped the whole genre on its head. The game delights in pushing almost every boundary of the console RPG forward while keeping the flavour of the original titles intact. Not content with merely jamming its three CDs with a sprawling adventure, the game constantly strives to surprise, and ends up succeeding in just about every department imaginable.

Final Fantasy VII constantly strives to surprise, and ends up succeeding in just about every department imaginable

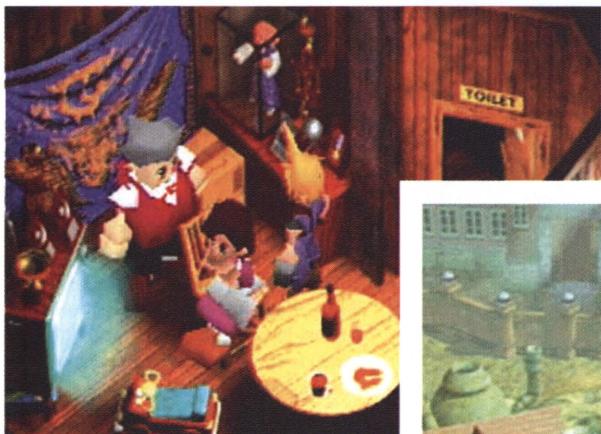
Leading the way, initially, are a seemingly endless array of complex realtime and pre-rendered graphic sequences. That Square had nearly every Silicon Graphics machine in Japan working flat out to create them is no surprise, with the smallest shop, in the most out-of-the-way village, packed with as much detail as the most important location. Meanwhile, everything is cleverly layered to allow the realtime, Gouraud-shaded characters to move in and around them as if they were proper 3D structures.

While most non-RPG fans will cite the frequent random battle encounters and stop-start combat system as common Japanese RPG problems, *FFVII* builds on Square's patented Active Time Battle system and has had the surprise attacks toned down for its western release. While beginners can restrict fights to a simple taking-turns structure, at its realtime fastest, with dramatic camera angles



sweeping around the graphics, battles can elevate to almost action-game status.

Although *FFVII* has been tweaked somewhat for its western version (including additional monsters and even such niceties as markers indicating entrances and exits from a scene), it's admirable that Square has kept what might be seen as the game's unique 'Japanese-ness'. All of the original's 'adult' scenes have been left intact, and even the six-character limit previously inflicted on protagonists' names has been extended to nine, allowing the original Japanese names to



The incredibly detailed backdrops aren't merely for show – they're also highly interactive

be kept. And even if some of the dialogue's Americanisms grate after a while, it does attempt to recompense in making up for the English text's inability to convey as much meaning as the original Japanese.

The 'interactive movie' has long been a dirty term to anyone who values playability, but *FFVII* succeeds in coming closer than any videogame yet. The complex story and excellently orchestrated chip music combine to make players feel real empathy with the characters. This is hardly the easiest of feats and a task usually shied away from by the action/comedy-oriented western graphic adventures. Anyone prepared to commit to playing *Final Fantasy VII* through to its conclusion will be well rewarded by what is most probably the most entertaining title the PlayStation has to yet to offer.



Although remaining turn-based, the battles in *Final Fantasy VII* can still get as hectic as any out-and-out RPG-styled action game

Although generated using a scant amount of polygons, *FFVII*'s characters behave so realistically that suspending belief is an easy task. The game's plot is the crux, however

In retrospect



Urban myth has it as the most returned videogame of all time, but perhaps that's more indicative of the appalling opening press-X-on-everything half-hour than any wider criticism of the adventure that built Square's reputation outside Japan. *FFVII* attempted to build on that success by removing the superdeformed physiques of the characters and painting the world in darker colours, but, despite the addition of a card-based subgame, it emerged as a less varied – and less interesting – game. *FFIX* retained the cards and returned to the series' roots, but failed to recapture the compelling (if not entirely thrilling) dynamic of *FFVII*.

Quake II

Format: PC Publisher: Activision Developer: id Software Origin: US Date: 1998

Reviewed in E54



Quake II features some seriously ferocious foes, each one appearing in full polygon 3D form, to excellent effect

In retrospect

Though id established its reputation with the massively influential *Doom* and *Quake*, *Quake II* cemented the company's standing as the arbiter of the ground rules of the firstperson shooter genre. It also paved the way for the purely multiplayer experience of subsequent titles like *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament* as well as hastening 3D acceleration technology.

Lighting effects are liberally employed throughout the accelerated *Quake II*, adding much to its atmosphere

Post-*Quake*, shoot 'em up freaks have existed in a kind of purgatory, making do with some of the palest imitations imaginable. There was even a question mark over the mighty id Software's ability to reach its previous heights, following inter-company ructions and the belief among purists that *Quake* didn't advance the genre as much as previous id offerings had. But *Quake II* demonstrates that, if id has been stumbling through some kind of ordeal, it has emerged twice as strong as before.

The story is thus: as one of thousands of marines sent to combat the evil Stroggs on the alien planet from which they have been waging a fierce battle with Earth, the player is the only one to get there alive, and must reduce the entire Stroggo complex to a shambles. Veteran id gamers might imagine that, in order to do this, it would be necessary to complete a series of linear stages until, perhaps, some sort of inner sanctum is reached. But *Quake II* is a lot less straightforward and not at all linear.

The game's levels are arranged around hubs rather than in a chain. Each of these 'units' has an overall objective, which typically involves much toing and froing between levels, as players perform different tasks. This instantly throws up a new technique: the need to frequently hit F1 to find out what the overall unit objectives and next tasks are.

There are ten units in all and a number of boss levels (the end ones are particularly fierce). Each unit is more convoluted than any one of *Quake*'s parallel, unrelated game paths, but this is not to say that the full-on visceral thrill has been diminished.

Thanks to a hugely improved degree of cunning among the monsters, and some intelligent rethinking of how players must employ their weaponry, it's more intense than ever before. Because each unit demands more skill, thought and involvement than any part of *Quake*, and because players have to do so much in order to make any progress, the sense of satisfaction that *Quake II* provides is unprecedented.

Improved physics, better AI, different tactics. *Quake II* has been hailed as one of the best PC games ever published, and it's difficult to disagree with this assessment. It moves the whole *Doom*-style genre forward, skipping at least one entire generation in the process, and is undoubtedly id Software's crowning glory.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Ultima Online

Format: PC Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Origin Systems Origin: US Date: 1998

Reviewed in E54

Throughout its long and illustrious history, the *Ultima* series of games has become synonymous with computer role-playing, especially on the PC. It formed the basis upon which Origin Systems was built and has become one of the most consistently successful and innovative game lines ever. Without *Ultima Underworld*, for example, the world of computer games might never have been shaken to its core by *Doom*.

Therefore, when Origin announced that the next game in the series wasn't going to be the long-awaited *Ultima IX* but an online, multiplayer version, expectations were very high indeed. MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) aren't a new idea – they predate the Internet by several years – but previous games of this type had nearly always been text-based, and small in scope. *Ultima Online*, however, was going to present an entire world to explore, all via a cutting-edge graphical engine.

Now, after more man-years of development than any other game in the series, *Ultima Online* has arrived. And, to fans of either role-playing or online games, to say it's been worth the wait would be a huge understatement. Simply put, *Ultima Online* is the most ambitious multiplayer game ever published. Origin, at last, has lived up to its tag line: "We create worlds".

Ultima Online offers players a vast, detailed fantasy world to explore, presented with high-resolution graphics and based on a game engine that any oneplayer RPG would be proud of. It's not all sunshine and SVGA roses, though, especially for British players. The biggest problem with *Ultima Online* is the game's sheer popularity. Origin was prepared for a big response, with six separate servers set up across the US, but what it hadn't counted on was the length of time people would spend playing. The result is that not only is the game very crowded most of the time, but the lag can be a killer. At certain times of day, players simply won't be able to connect, and if they do, the load on the servers is such that they'll often have to put up with long delays and pauses in the action.

Despite these problems, though, *Ultima Online* is one of the most impressive and absorbing gaming experiences ever, and a real step forward for Internet gaming in general. Provided players have the time, and the cash to afford the phone bills, it's a game unlike any other, and for role-playing fans, it is, in short, a dream come true.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



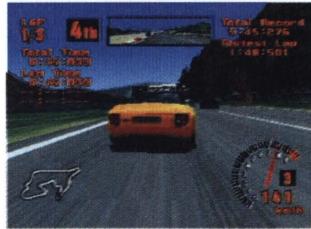
In retrospect

While *Ultima VIII* was stodgy and disappointing, and *Ultima IX* barely worked on all but the most fortunate of would-be Brittanians' PCs, *Ultima Online* flipped back to VII's explorative ethic. A logical progression from text-based MUDs, the sprite-based universe proved as compelling as it was consistent, and drew in thousands of subscribers. It also paved the way for *Everquest* and *Asheron's Call*, which in turn provided the impetus for *Ultima Online*'s recent 3D makeover.

The *Ultima* world is present and correct in this online version, with attractive SVGA graphics

Gran Turismo

Format: PlayStation | Publisher: SCEI | Developer: Polyphony | Origin: Japan | Date: 1998



Once tuned up and maxed out, cars take on a far more menacing appearance than their original form

Gran Turismo: The Real Driving Simulator, to give its full Japanese moniker, is possibly the greatest driving game of all time. To say that it takes its racing seriously would redefine the term 'understatement'. Indeed, anyone doubting *Gran Turismo's* genuine devotion to racing driving will more than likely be convinced by the 54-page reference guide that accompanies the already substantial game manual. It offers everything from advice on driving technique – including 12 pages on the art of 'drifting' – to a technical breakdown of every model buried within the game's code.

GT probably features more cars in one game than the whole of last year's PlayStation racing games put together. Sony's PR department proudly boasts that 'over 250' are available and – amazingly – they all handle differently. This is perhaps GT's most impressive aspect. The physics models are so accurate that anyone whose motoring experience extends beyond prosaic machinery is able to differentiate between front, rear and four wheel drive vehicles, not to mention front and mid-engined vehicles.

It's a safe assumption to say that most players will rush to partake in the arcade mode. Here only Japanese machines are available at first, along with a mere four tracks – although playing it through will reveal the game's other courses as well as grant access to the European and US cars. The most surprising feature, however, is the ability to engage in a time trial on three night courses running at an arcade-like 60 frames a second. Admittedly, in order to achieve this, GT's developer had to sacrifice its lighting effects, as well as simplifying scenery and removing all other cars from the track. Still, technical demonstrations have never proved so playable.

However, the beating heart of the game lies in the GT option. Players start off with a

Not only does it redefine the concept of PlayStation racing games, GT sets a new standard of excellence for all other platforms

limited sum of money with which to purchase a second-hand car and enter spot races with the purpose of earning more money. Accumulate sufficient winnings to acquire superior machinery so as to better the chances of winning higher ranking championships. To enter the latter, potential



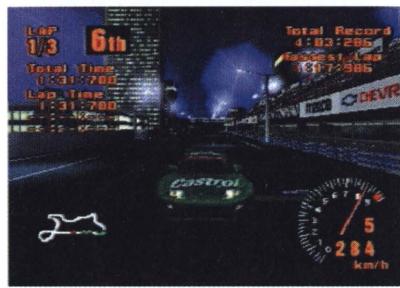
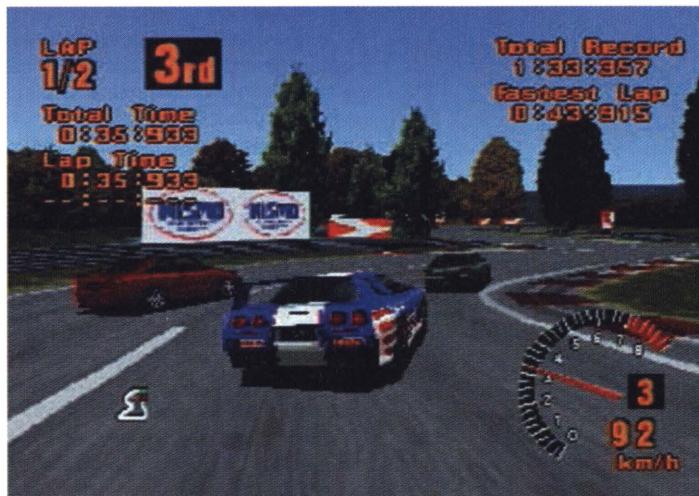
The amount of cars on offer is simply bewildering. Furthermore, GT allows players to alter every aspect of the vehicles such as ride height, brake balance, suspension stiffness and even the level of turbo boost

racing drivers must first obtain a racing licence. Three of these exist, but once a 'pass' is obtained players face a veritable feast of different cups – 13 in all – from short four-race meetings to 30- and 60-lap affairs on one of 21 tracks, all rich in scenic detail. The cups themselves are varied in nature and range from front, rear, and four wheel drive competitions to tuned car sessions and full GT-prepared racing car events.

Once the money starts rolling in, players can opt to upgrade to a faster, more powerful, better handling machine or decide to tune up their current model. This is where things get silly. Imagine the acceleration figures of a Mitsubishi GTO that – once fully souped-up – boasts an astounding 955bhp and a top speed around the 400kph (250mph) mark. Indeed, there is much fun in deliberately taking ridiculously inferior machines and seeing what may be achieved by adding a multitude of racing components. And this is one of GT's primary strengths – the anticipation of seeing how a particular model is going to handle after modifications is fully justified once on the track (and, more often than not, off it, too).

However, despite all of this attention to realism, GT is a far more forgiving, and therefore accessible, game than TOCA Touring Car Championship, for example. Anyone with a basic knowledge of driving should get round most of the tracks without much trouble, yet the application of the slightest racing technique will immediately shave seconds off the lap times. This is GT's greatest achievement. No other racing game has ever offered players such a convincing and rewarding racing environment.

There is, of course, no such thing as a perfect game, GT included. One possible criticism would be the relatively small number of cars on the track. This is a direct result of the PlayStation's technical limitations and never a problem for most of the time as the racing is so close players are constantly dealing with cars in front and behind. However, during the 60-lap 300 Grand Valley race it's possible to pull away from the other five contestants and spend a large proportion of the one hour and 38 minutes out in front with only the occasional need to overtake one of the backmarkers or pit in for a fresh set of tyres.



Racing titles have remained fundamentally the same for the last 20 years. While *Gran Turismo* doesn't represent as immediate and apparent a departure from traditional racing games as *Super Mario 64* did for platform games, for example, it is the most realistic, detailed and playable example of an extensive genre. Not only does it manage to redefine the concept of PlayStation racing games, *Gran Turismo* sets a new standard of excellence for all other platforms to follow.

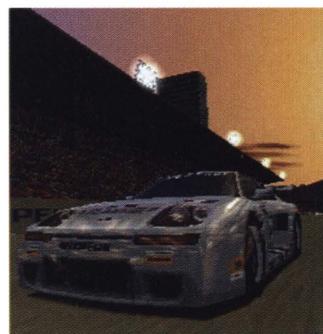


Edge rating:

Ten out of ten

Although it isn't possible to flip the cars (above left), that didn't stop Edge from trying. Incredibly, watching the replays is like witnessing a real race such is the authentic behaviour of the cars

In retrospect



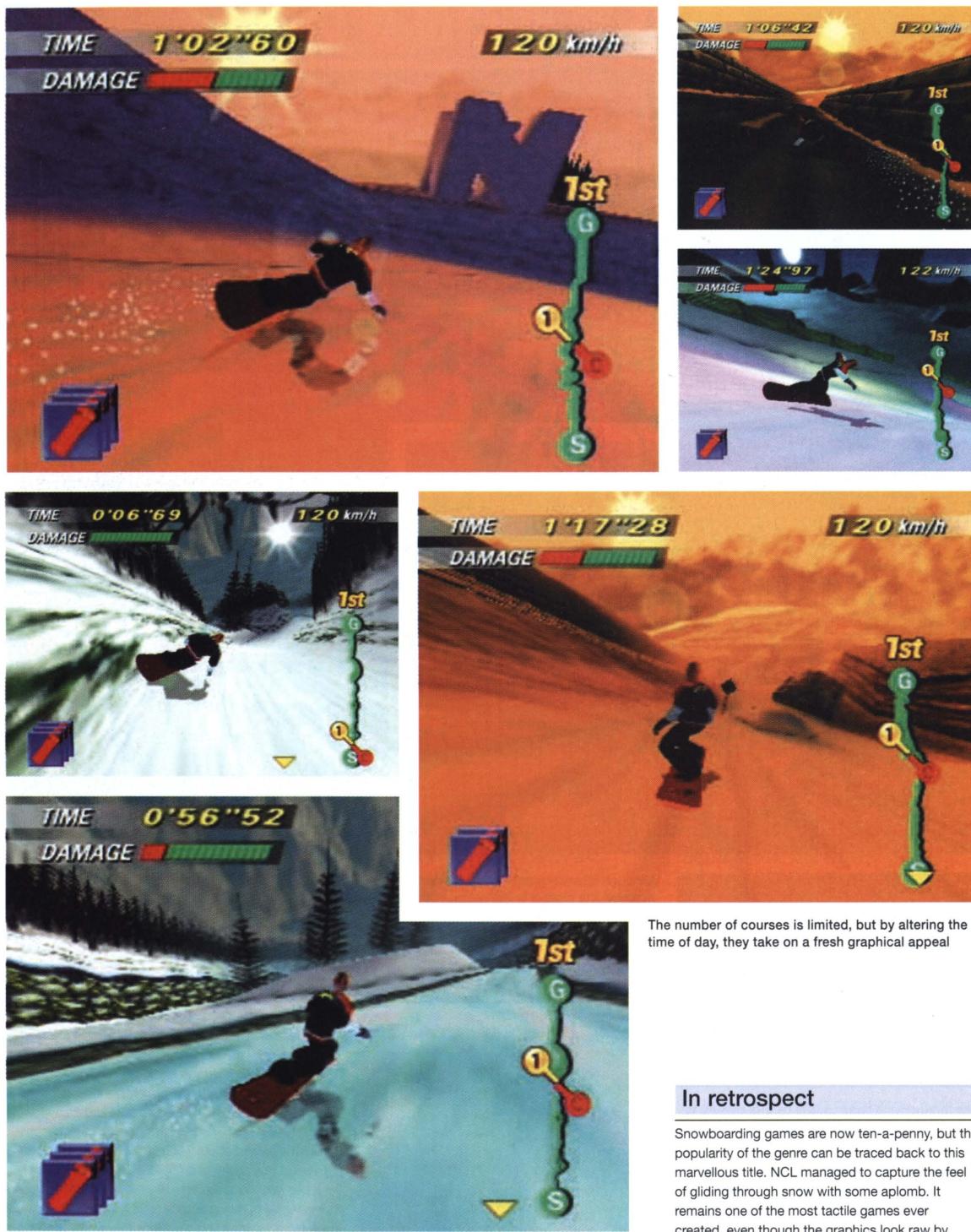
The three driving tests usually require players to complete one lap or a particular section of a track within a fairly strict time limit.

There are still a few Sega zealots who revile *Edge* for giving Kazunori Yamauchi's first masterpiece top marks. At the time, it was completely justified. *Gran Turismo* didn't just up the stakes in terms of graphical sophistication but comprehensively overhauled the genre by offering an intricate handling model and an astonishing level of vehicle customisation. Put simply, this game was absolutely unimaginable a year before its release. If Polyphony had not followed up the original with two sequels then *Gran Turismo* would still represent the pinnacle of racing entertainment. While GT2 included even more vehicles and a sublime rally element, a bug in early code meant that players could not complete the game 100%. The PS2 iteration (left) is a facsimile of what has gone before but with sumptuous visuals.

1080° Snowboarding

Format: N64 ■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: In-house ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 1998

Reviewed in E57



A major diversion for Nintendo, 1080° Snowboarding offers up a tense, realistic take on the snowboarding sport. Graphically, it's quite sumptuous, and the analogue control is nigh-on perfect. The only drawback is that the cartridge format limits the range and size of courses available.

The number of courses is limited, but by altering the time of day, they take on a fresh graphical appeal

In retrospect

Snowboarding games are now ten-a-penny, but the popularity of the genre can be traced back to this marvellous title. NCL managed to capture the feel of gliding through snow with some aplomb. It remains one of the most tactile games ever created, even though the graphics look raw by today's standards. Though SSX might deliver greater speed, the game's real spiritual successor is the equally haptic Amped on Xbox.

This isn't a typical Nintendo release. Anyone expecting to see a flock of cute polygons, careening down a cartoon mountainside while shouting nonsensical comments at each other, is in for a shock. 1080° takes itself seriously.

Players are faced with a multitude of competitions, although the majority will find it hard to resist a quick Match race. This offers a series of races against a CPU snowboarder that are divided into three difficulty levels, each of which adds the challenge of a new track to its predecessor's tally.

However, after a couple of descents, players may feel the urge to expand their abilities – the courses are littered with jumps and obstacles that beg to be dodged with more aplomb than a casual flick of the board's backside. 1080°'s Practice mode offers players the choice of a halfpipe or an obstacle course in which to attempt any of the game's possible stunts.

Feeling confident with their newly found snowboarding skills, players can now take part in the very enjoyable Contest mode. Here, points are everything as the first three tracks are transformed into slalom courses, and players must negotiate the gates successfully in order to gain extra time as well as slipping in as many impressive tricks as possible. Ironically, both the Stunt Attack and Time Attack modes (in which it is possible to save and race against a player's ghost) prove more enjoyable than the actual Match racing.

All of this results in the most convincing videogame emulation of the snowboarding experience so far. Whether struggling for control on a frozen river, or cutting silently through powdered snow, no other game has come so close to capturing the sport's dynamics. That said, only Deadly Fall – 1080°'s final course – is as 'open' as any real life piste, enabling players to make their way to the bottom without feeling restricted.

Nevertheless, the lesser courses are still worth exploring as, in typical Nintendo fashion, they offer plenty in the way of alternative routes and potential shortcuts. A little exploration can yield some impressive surprises – and of course, there's the highly playable two-player option, which employs fogging and a marginal loss of detail in order to maintain an acceptably high framerate.

1080° is flawed, true, but persistent players will be surprised and delighted by moments of sheer brilliance.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Panzer Dragoon Saga

Format: Saturn | Publisher: Sega | Developer: Team Andromeda | Origin: Japan | Date: 1998

Reviewed in E57

It's a testament to Team Andromeda's versatility that the *Panzer Dragoon* series has shed its shallow-but-lavish shoot 'em up brief in favour of a complex RPG mandate. *Saga* retains its predecessors' aesthetics, but adds a creative depth only SquareSoft games can currently rival.

Rather than re-record *Saga*'s considerable spoken-word content, Sega has decided to add English language subtitles. Though many will regard this as a blatant exercise in budget trimming, *Saga*'s use of text is infinitely preferable to the alternative of B-list actors reciting words they have little feeling for.

Saga's gameplay is separated into three distinct sections: exploring with the well-named hero Edge on foot, travelling longer distances on Edge's companion Dragon and fighting battles. Separate zones are accessed via a traditional map screen. Each of these, from the valleys of an excavation site to the open spaces of a desert inhabited by enormous 'Dune'-style worms, boast distinctive visuals. When Edge chooses to explore alone, the resultant third-person view enables players to discover objects which can be examined and collected with a cursor; some contain collectable items, while others offer information or represent part of a puzzle. Dragon is controlled in realtime within a zone, but progressing to other areas is only possible through targeting a suitable exit.

Like *Final Fantasy VII*, *Panzer Dragoon* *Saga*'s battles start often and without warning. *Saga* uses a power bar system similar to *FFVII*'s to regulate the frequency of attacks, but its combat is far more tactical. Identifying weak points in assailants, the player can move the position of Dragon to attack accordingly. Equally, enemies often jockey for position to employ their more devastating attacks.

Panzer Dragoon Saga's gameplay is unquestionably engrossing, but superlatives can't do justice to its extensive FMV cut-scenes. The introductory sequences alone last over 20 minutes, and have a cinematic quality that shames the work of almost every other developer **Edge** cares to mention. Their addition makes *Saga* complete, an RPG of true creative integrity. It's a tragedy that the Saturn's standing will ensure Team Andromeda's adventure, with a radically different approach to *FFVII*, will enjoy only a fraction of its rival's success.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



In retrospect

Some three years after the original *Panzer Dragoon* (E20) invigorated a relatively tired, on-rails, shoot 'em up formula, Sega's Team Andromeda turned its hand to shaking up another genre in danger of stagnation. The results were astonishing. Sadly, owing to the commercial demise of the Saturn, barely a handful of people were fortunate enough to experience a title which is currently still one of the most expensive console games to be sold on Internet auction sites. Though Team Andromeda has since been scattered to the winds (well, other internal development teams), Smilebit has announced that it is to resuscitate the series on Microsoft's Xbox. No doubt it will be hoping for a greater degree of commercial success.

Every *Panzer Dragoon Saga* location boasts its own distinctive visual style. To describe it as the most attractive Saturn game created is no exaggeration

Sections where Edge (the in-game character) wanders alone play a large part in the advancement of *Saga*'s storyline

Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines

Format: PC Publisher: Eidos Developer: Pyro Studios Origin: Spain Date: 1998

Reviewed in E61



The geography of the levels in *Commandos* might not be wholly convincing, but the situations facing players present new challenges

In retrospect

While it was a competent interpretation of the realtime strategy genre, the real key to the sizeable commercial success of *Commandos* was its generous system requirements. Rather than aiming at owners of state-of-the-art PCs, equipped with superfast processors and 3D support, Pyro Studios produced a title that was playable by just about anyone who owned a computer. And this more than compensated for a steep learning curve in the eyes of the mainstream consumer.



It is possible to observe all of the characters' moves concurrently (above right) while the line-of-sight routines are well handled, adding much to the gameplay

Of all the exponents of the new unit-based wargame genre to arrive so far, *Commandos* is the first to really capture the essence of the idea. Ostensibly, it features a design that leaves as much room for strategy as it does for realtime excitement, and a control system that is able to cope with the demands of both.

Graphically the game seems to belong to another era, with hand-drawn mugshots and landscape graphics that evoke the 'Commando' comic books of childhood. But *Commandos* is happy to follow its own internal wargame logic, and use familiar imagery, situations and exploits to evoke the spirit of World War II. Thus scuba gear, patrol boats, cable cars, roadblocks and other staples of countless Hollywood movies all loom large. There's one character that acts as a spy, able to infiltrate enemy compounds unquestioned by enemy guards. It all creates a terrific sense of atmosphere, despite the obvious lack of realism.

Yet, when it comes to the abilities of the characters, and their interaction with the enemy, *Commandos* is at great pains to do things by the book. Each commando has a unique skill – the Green Beret is good with a knife, the Sniper can take opponents out from distance. Line of sight also figures strongly here, with visible cone overlays revealing what the enemy can 'see'. Two distinct areas indicate what can be seen fully, and what is only visible above ground level (ie making it safe to crawl). The enemy is also programmed to hear events, and so the destruction of military gear often results in utter chaos.

Commandos successfully addresses the problem of placing up to six characters under player control by providing the option to split the screen up in a variety of ways. The movements of each are displayed in separate windows, which can be zoomed in or out, and even switched to track the movements of another character (friend or foe). It can be confusing, but ultimately proves hugely entertaining. Much like the game as a whole.

Ironically, however, it's the combat that blots the game's copybook. Attacks often happen too fast for a response – the point-and-click system being inefficient. But it's not long before the need for stealth becomes obvious, confrontation often arising only as a last resort. The action may be realtime, but the tactics required to play successfully reveal it to be a complex wargame.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Colin McRae Rally

Format: PlayStation | Publisher: Codemasters | Developer: In-house | Origin: UK | Date: 1998

Reviewed in E61

Based around the racing exploits of British rally ace McRae, Codemasters' latest driving game utilises the bare bones of its TOCA graphic engine. However, where past rally titles have been less than literal in their interpretation of the sport, CMR is a pure rallying simulation, with only one car on the track at a time, struggling to beat the other competitors' times.

In order to keep the action from straying into the realms of dull time trials, a novel system has been implemented that constantly tracks the player's position, comparing it to that of other drivers. It's a neat touch, keeping the action tense throughout each stage.

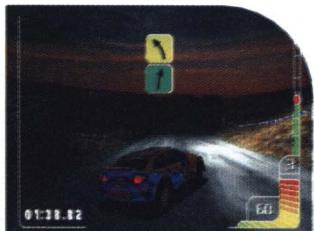
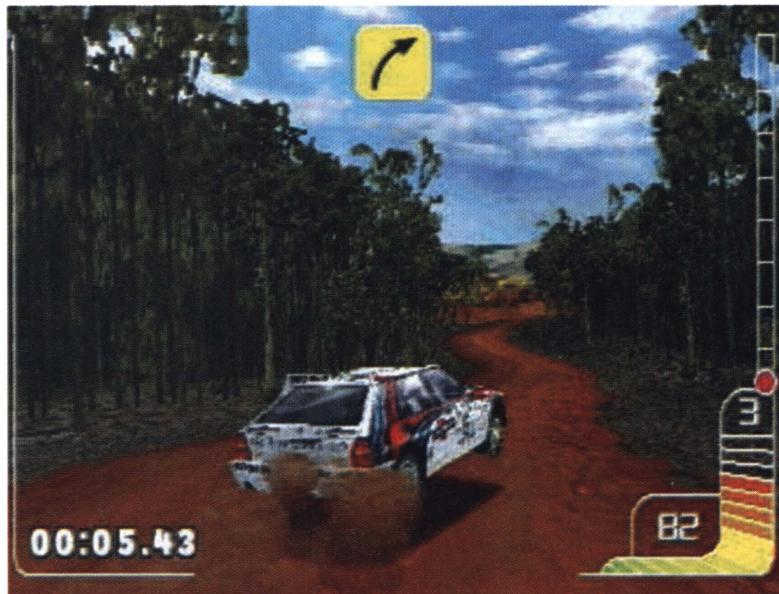
As in TOCA, successful progress is rewarded with a comprehensive selection of past rally cars. CMR's licensed vehicles are imbued with a driving feel that surpasses those of the past hero of this genre, Sega Rally. In fact its realistic feel ranks alongside that of Nintendo's sublime 1080°, and brings about the same desire to replay stages to perfection.

Blessed with over 50 tracks, a reasonable two-player mode, watchable Gran Turismo-style replays and its fine handling, CMR provides the ultimate in rallying reproduction.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



In retrospect

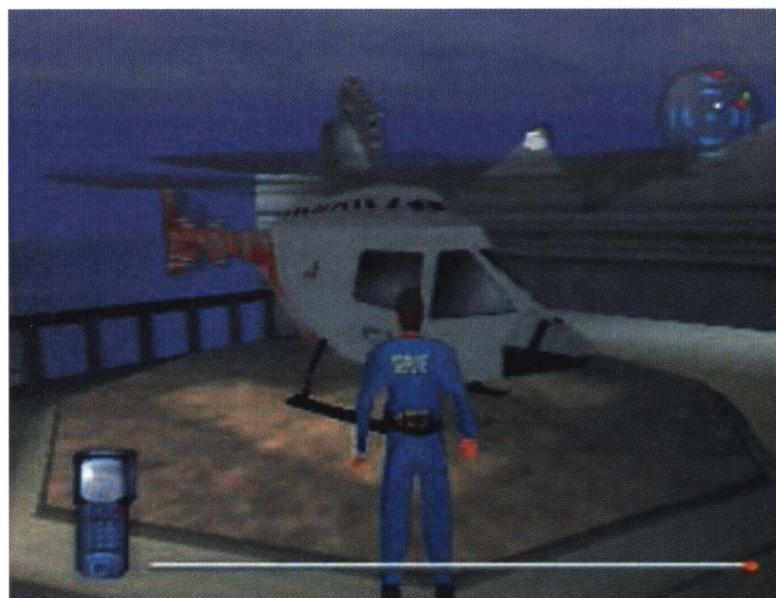
There had been other rally games before, but when Codemasters came on the scene with this licence they effectively kick-started a sub-genre of the driving game. Impressively, the title managed to convey tension and drama even though no other vehicles were on the road. The sequel was even better and Codemasters are due to release a next-gen iteration in 2002.

One of the niggles with *Colin McRae Rally* is that the cars don't quite 'weigh' enough, causing extended crash sequences. Jumps become much more effective though...

Mission: Impossible

Format: N64 | Publisher: Infogrames | Developer: In-house | Origin: France | Date: 1998

Reviewed in E62



Ethan Hunt prepares to board a small, pointy helicopter. The game suffers from an inconsistency of design, with some levels detailed and interesting, while others are spartan and bland



In retrospect

The N64 incarnation of *M:I* was troubled from the start. Work began under the auspices of Ocean's UK offices, and was then folded into the French operation when Ocean succumbed to market pressure and was bought out. Moving projects half-way through is always problematic, and the fact that *M:I* was supposed to break new territory in the complexity of its storytelling merely exacerbated the situation. In the end, *M:I* appeared late, bugged and structurally flawed. Whether this was due to intrinsic problems with the N64 architecture, or over-optimism on the part of Infogrames remains open to debate.

Mission: Impossible is easily one of the year's biggest disappointments, joining the endless ranks of previous deeply disheartening film licences.

In an attempt to inject some cinematic feel into the game, Infogrames has included plenty of cut-scenes with comprehensive operation briefings to carry the action along, but unfortunately this is the only time the game manages to successfully convey any sort of atmosphere resembling the 'Mission: Impossible' film or series. All the gadgets are present, but the spirit is missing. Playing *M:I* is a tension-free affair, with players caring little about whether Hunt survives or not.

One of *GoldenEye*'s strengths is the way it captures the James Bond theme, dragging players into its utterly convincing world. It's not a question of viewpoint, but rather a subtle mixture of realism, intelligent level design, and above all, truly involving gameplay. All elements that *Mission: Impossible* lacks. The character animation is poor, and other than a few notable exceptions, the environments are barren and uninspiring, with a disappointing graphical quality, all held together by a struggling 3D engine. This could, and should, have been so much more.

Edge rating:

Four out of ten

Turok 2: Seeds Of Evil

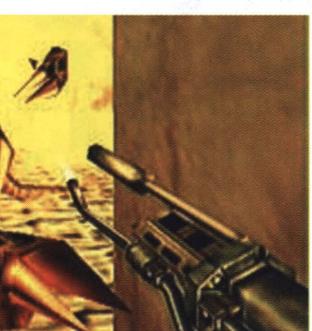
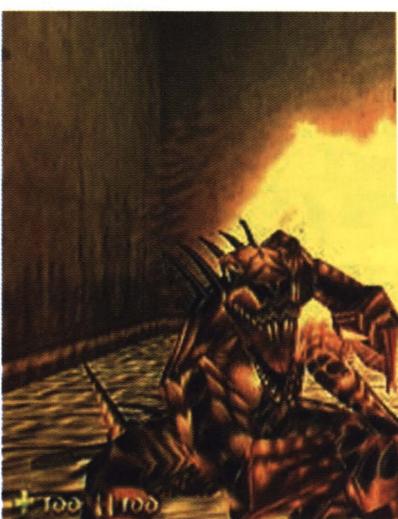
Format: N64 Publisher: Acclaim Developer: Iguana Origin: US Date: 1998

Reviewed in E63



In retrospect

The brilliant *Turok* did much to entice gamers over to the N64 so soon after the machine launched in Europe, but it set a perilously high benchmark for any sequel. Did *Edge* get it wrong? One mark off perfection was probably the result of giddy anticipation and a cover with more visual effects than a Jean Michelle Jarre concert. The game was good. The monsters were good, the weapons were good and the visuals were good. Unfortunately the pacing and general level design was lamentable. The series never really recovered and the franchise has become irrevocably tarnished.



Turok 2's range of alien adversaries is commendable, but the lack of any real dinosaurs disappoints. Fortunately, the swift animation and devious computer AI makes up for the overtly polygonal graphics.

The game makes full use of the N64 memory pak, running in glorious high-res mode throughout

Here Bond brought tight structure to the firstperson genre, *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* was all about detailed, atmospheric environments and seriously OTT weaponry.

Setting forth from where *Turok: Dinosaur Hunter* ended, the plot of this sequel features a new foe, the Primen, unleashed by the destruction of the Chronosceptre in the original game. Now assisted by new (female) sidekick Adon, the heavily armed hero must battle through six levels, finally confronting the Primen in its base.

From sombre swamps and ruined cities to neon-lit alien bases, *Seeds of Evil's* artistic range is remarkable. A new emphasis on sub-missions quickly becomes apparent, with the player having to save various captured humans. Other tasks include obtaining satchel charges and then using them to detonate well-hidden ammo dumps, while another involves riding a heavily armed dinosaur through a series of obstacles. Significant advances have also been made in enemy AI. While basic enemies will dodge and flee when attacked, others can take refuge behind objects. Tied to a detailed set of character animations, the AI creates enemies that put *Unreal*'s skittish, poorly realised adversaries to shame.

Inevitably, Iguana has absorbed certain aspects of *GoldenEye*, with *Turok*'s revamped armoury boasting two sniper weapons. Coupled with a new 3D engine, this brings a new pace to the game, with the player able to pick off distant targets with ease. A new paradigm in questionable violence is set by the Cerebral Bore which fires a drill-like dart into enemies' skulls, resulting in showers of red and grey matter pluming from their heads. Also of note is the flamethrower, which has easily the best graphic realisation of such equipment yet seen in a videogame.

Overall, *Turok 2* is a detailed and well-integrated title – not to mention an extremely enjoyable one. The technical, AI and design advances made since the release of the original game are more than enough to elicit a favourable response, while players keen to sample *Turok 2*'s multiplayer modes will not be disappointed, with a dozen bespoke levels to choose from and four players supported.

As with *GoldenEye*, there's a realistic sense of pace here that is missing from all too many contemporary, firstperson PC shooters – a factor which players of those games don't seem to appreciate. Their loss.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Radiant Silvergun

Format: Saturn ■ Publisher: ESP ■ Developer: Treasure ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 1998

Reviewed in E63

As one of a dying breed of software designers, Treasure has been reluctant to ditch its commitment to old school gaming principles – shooting (and lots of it) and weapons (and lots of them). It's paid off in the past, and it pays off here – this Saturn blaster impresses just as much as Treasure's legendary Mega Drive classic *Gunstar Heroes* did in its day. *Radiant Silvergun* also eclipses the legions of vacuous shoot 'em ups that have been designed for the 32bit era. This is one developer that's not forgotten how to deliver fast, furious action and a breathless adrenaline rush.

Swiftly ported from the much under-exploited ST-V coin-op to Sega's neglected console, *Radiant Silvergun* is arguably the finest technical showcase the Saturn has ever played host to. Polygonal structures tower above stunning, high-resolution parallax backdrops, Mode 7-style distorted playfields are rotated and zoomed, and 3D polygons are juggled effortlessly to create some of the most imaginative bosses seen to date.

Thankfully, Treasure has invested an equal amount of time in the design of the gameplay mechanics too. This is to ensure that *Radiant Silvergun* oozes hardcore appeal in every way. A diverse weapon system coupled with subtle bonuses and player reward systems saves it from any possible accusations of being mere eye candy. However, it is frustratingly tough throughout, occasionally sacrificing fairness for an endless onslaught of visual pyrotechnics. Often *Radiant Silvergun* moves so fast that it's hard to believe any player can best its later stages.

You'll be rewarded for your perseverance, though, if you're prepared to learn its intricacies (although it's doubtful whether the arcade mode's infinite Continues will be neglected for long). As a last-ditch attempt to show just how much clout Sega's machine packs when intelligently programmed, *Radiant Silvergun* is a wonder to behold. Inspired, high-octane blasting.



Edge rating: Eight out of ten



Unusually for a shoot 'em up, *Silvergun's* designers have included subtle player rewards and bonus systems to increase its replay value

In retrospect

When cornered, many Saturn supporters usually play the *Radiant Silvergun* card as a indisputable demonstration of the machine's power. But that's missing the point – this is the 2D shoot 'em up at its very best. Uncommonly balanced, audaciously inventive, savagely unrelenting and utterly compelling, *Radiant Silvergun* epitomised every videogaming element we had come to expect from adventurous softco Treasure. The fact that, remarkably, it's still all of those things today only serves to demonstrate just how astounding the experience seemed back in 1998. And why Edge's original score now seems a little on the harsh side.



Treasure's latest is quite possibly the greatest ever showcase of the Saturn's suite of custom hardware effects. It's also one of the most gut-wrenchingly tough shoot 'em ups ever created

Metal Gear Solid

Format: PlayStation Publisher: Konami Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1998

For such a high-profile game, *Metal Gear Solid* is initially disappointing, its slow pacing imparting a distinct sense of disillusionment. Yet soon enough you realise that this is Konami's way of easing you into what is a very different game to what's currently available on Sony's machine or indeed any other platform. Ignore what the packaging states – *MGS* is certainly not an action game. Anyone adopting that sort of strategy is unlikely to get past the initial credits without losing a life or two.

The plot runs thus: as Solid Snake, your mission is to infiltrate a 21st Century Alaskan nuclear weapon depot (currently besieged by the infamous FOXHOUND terrorist organisation) and regain control. Once a government-controlled outfit (which counted

Other games may boast visuals of higher resolution but few can claim to display as believable an environment as *Metal Gear Solid*

Snake as one of its members) engaged in highly delicate covert operations, FOXHOUND now comprises bitter, mentally unstable individuals who have undergone substantial alterations to their basic genetic code as a result of top-secret government-instigated experiments. Naturally, all are encountered at various points during the mission and they all possess differing attributes, therefore requiring a different approach in order to dispose of them.

There are good guys, too, of course. Throughout the game, Snake can count on the support of numerous characters via radio communication who provide vital information during important confrontations. And at several significant points during his mission, certain individuals offer assistance which, depending on the situation, can be anything from plot revelations to artillery backup.

MGS does not like to be rushed. It is a very specifically paced title and arcade heads are likely to find its tempo a little unsettling at first. Ideally, every move is planned, every potential passageway investigated, the guards' patrols studied and security cameras located for any opportunity that allows progression without detection. Should detection occur, Snake must evade the enemy's limited perceptive range for a short time before things return to normal.

The game's unhurried nature is further reflected in the numerous cut-scenes. These



Metal Gear Solid's use of a high-angled camera (above left) reflects Konami's understanding of playability and is particularly reminiscent of the original 8bit *Metal Gear* game



The level of detail in the game is inspired. In the toilets, for example, the hand dryer actually works. Note the console next to the PC in the image above

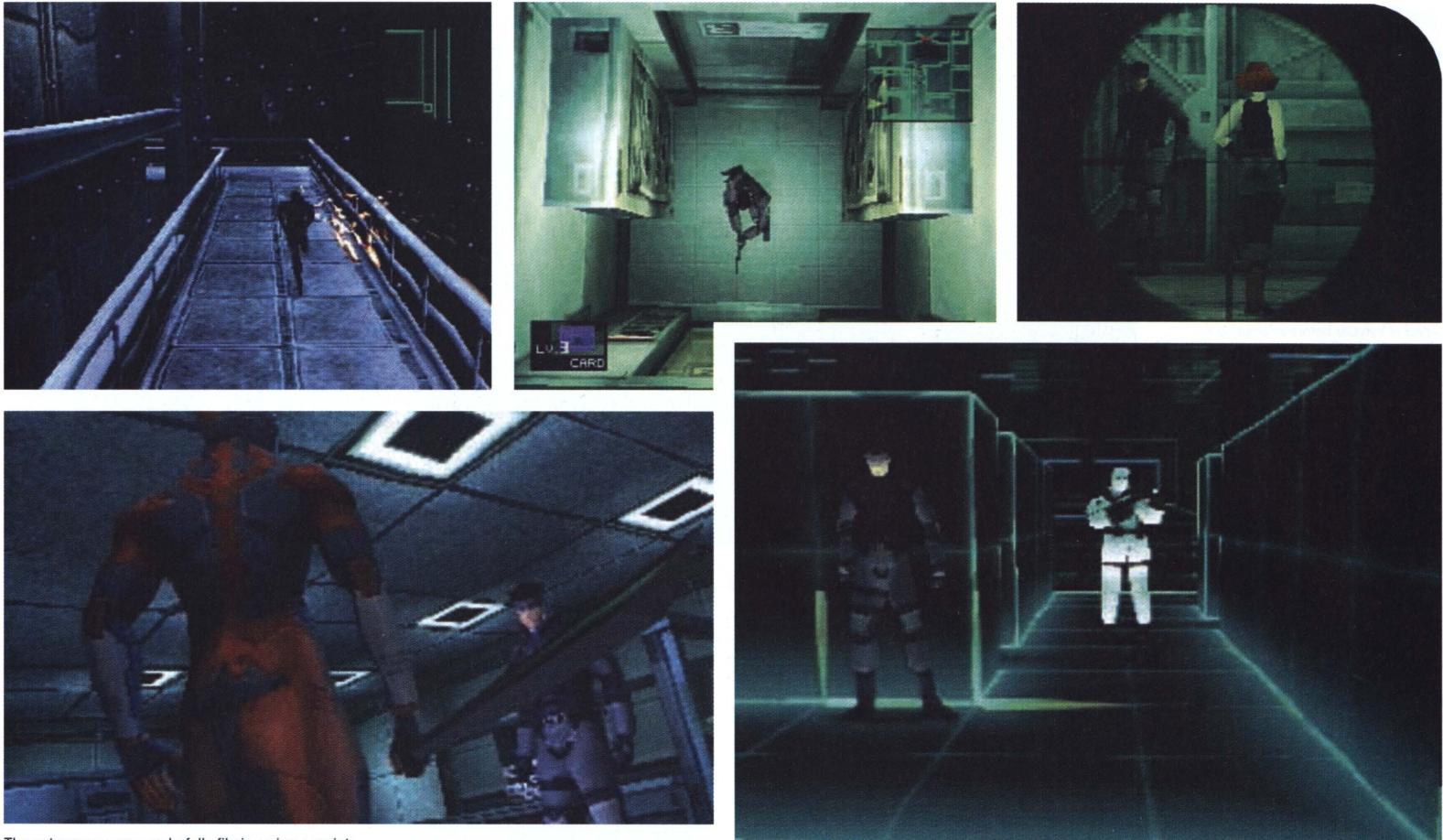
feature some incredibly cinematic sequences with multiple camera angles, motion blur and other effects, and reveal plot developments. They are also some of the longest examples yet seen in a videogame – over ten minutes' worth is not uncommon – and explain the necessity of the game's two-CD format.

Considering their quality, the graphics are also likely to occupy a substantial chunk of the available storage data. Other games may boast visuals of higher resolution but few can claim to display as believable an environment as *MGS*. It's all in the detail – the soldiers, for example, sport different uniforms depending on their role, from the simplistic, blueish/grey appearance of the infantrymen to the thicker, baggier, mint-green look of the arctic warfare troops. Toilets used by the occupying soldiers are littered with cigarette ends while those in the prison cells reflect their dubious

hygienic status by having maggots happily crawling all over the enclosure's floor.

It is odd, then, that Konami should erode some of the realism it's worked so hard to create by representing weapons and ammo as floating, rotating boxes. A more important failure in this department, though, concerns enemies: you may have painstakingly crept up to soldiers, grabbed and dragged them away to a secluded corner in order to quietly snap their neck, and yet they regenerate once Snake returns to a room, shattering the real-world illusion. But while some of the game's other aspects are also unrealistic, it's all to maintain maximum playability.

MGS is all about atmosphere and Konami's masterpiece is as sonically accomplished as it is graphically. There is a sense of perpetual tension and it is excellently complemented by one of the most



The cut-scenes are wonderfully filmic, using a variety of cinematic techniques to heighten the tension

atmospheric scores ever heard in a game. From the evocative melody at the start to the fast-paced themes during the action sequences, the music accompanies the gameplay with impressive competence.

Ultimately, *Metal Gear Solid* rewards players in a way only a pitiful number of games do. Just when you think there's nothing else that it can do to surprise you, along comes a situation that requires a new use for a weapon, or an alternative application of a familiar button. Until the game is finished, its gameplay elements continually threaten to change, offering players new challenges to deal with.

While it lasts, this is one of the most satisfying experiences PlayStation owners are ever likely to have.



Confronting the psychotic Vulcan Raven (above) is a genuinely stressful experience

Even the training mode in *Metal Gear Solid* is good. After completing each of the ten levels once, the time attack and gun shooting modes follow

In retrospect



Lost on those that rushed through it, Konami's tactical espionage venture presented the most convincing example of reality-based consistency within a console game for its time and is singularly responsible for instigating a subsequent mob of copycat titles. But the game's commercial success is its least notable feature. Rather, the sense of freedom afforded to gamers in between cinematic sequences which left the dealing of situations faced restricted only by a player's intelligence (if playing the Japanese version) remains *Metal Gear Solid's* most appealing facet.



Grand Prix Legends

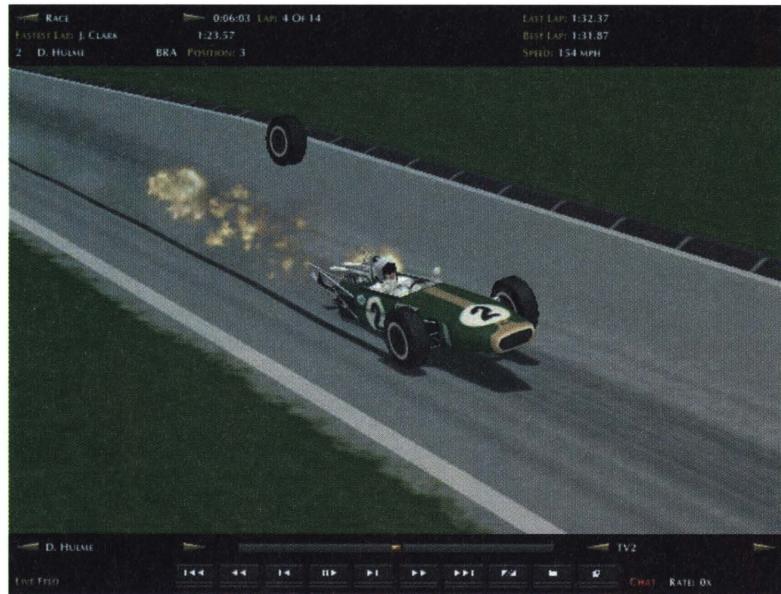
Format: PC Publisher: Sierra Developer: Papyrus Origin: US Date: 1998

Reviewed in E64



In retrospect

Sim specialist Papyrus had previously focused its tremendous attention on the world of IndyCar before attempting to recreate the thrill of engaging in the glamour of the '60s F1 circuit. As with all of its titles, the detail proved phenomenal and the experience demanded dedication (not to mention a steering wheel set-up). More importantly, *GPL* finally provided a worthy alternative to Geoff Crammond's *Grand Prix 2* for players that had been waiting for what seemed like an eternity (but was in reality just over two and a half years).



Papyrus' game captures the essence of the sport during the 1960s in a manner that should prove irresistible for F1 fans. Everything is recreated with realism and playability in mind

Grand Prix Legends simulates a time when F1 racing was uncluttered by sponsorship, drone-like drivers, a safety-obsessed governing body and downforce. The '60s were arguably F1's finest era.

Circuits constituted a smooth strip of tarmac with a grass verge either side, lined by a fence incapable of holding back a squirrel, let alone a car approaching at 160mph. Long open turns featured prominently, usually taken flat out, and chicanes were called 'chickens' after the few drivers who favoured them. But the circuits then all had one thing in common: they were exceptional fun while being extraordinarily demanding.

GPL features superbly reproduced tracks and sumptuous scenery. More impressive still are the cars, displaying the same attention to detail evident in the rest of the game. Aurally, each car has its own particular roar but few things in life sound as impressive as the Ferrari 312's V12 screaming as its 410bhp propels you down one of Monza's long straights.

Grand Prix Legends mixes terrific visuals with astoundingly realistic dynamics, resulting in one of the most rewarding car-related PC experiences ever. The result is pure videogaming elegance.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Abe's Exoddus

Format: PlayStation Publisher: GT Interactive Developer: Oddworld Inhabitants Origin: US Date: 1998

Reviewed in E65

Abe's Oddysee was one of the better platformers to appear on today's hardware. Its combination of well-worn 2D design values with the thoughtful implementation of language, and a dark adult humour created a truly interesting game.

This time around, the designers have given Abe more to say. Abe is an incredibly flexible character, with a huge range of abilities – talking, possessing other creatures, becoming invisible – all of which are put to good use. What's also interesting is the way the designers play on these abilities. It's rare to use a skill only once – you often have to figure out how to re-use it in unrelated ways. A sure sign of sound game design.

Elsewhere, the eight individual stages are expertly crafted, and that familiar black humour has returned, bolstered by the occasional fart joke. The plot (Abe stops evil Glukkons from exploiting his fellow Mudokons), overall visual themes and general gameplay devices, however, remain more or less identical to the first title. *Exoddus* is a polished sequel yet Oddworld should perhaps have considered what LucasArts did with *Monkey Island 2*, and turned the whole story upside down.



In retrospect

Lanning's team are X-branded now, but in late 1998 their second Oddworld game hit the PlayStation to critical acclaim. The point raised by *Edge*, though – that a sequel somewhat diminishes the charm of the first iteration, given that much of its appeal came from its uniqueness – is especially valid now. *Munch's Oddysee* is smart enough, but you can't help but wish it'd be more surprising.



Those familiar with the first Oddworld title will find the creatures and gloomy level design depressingly similar. The game does feature a clever use of background lighting though

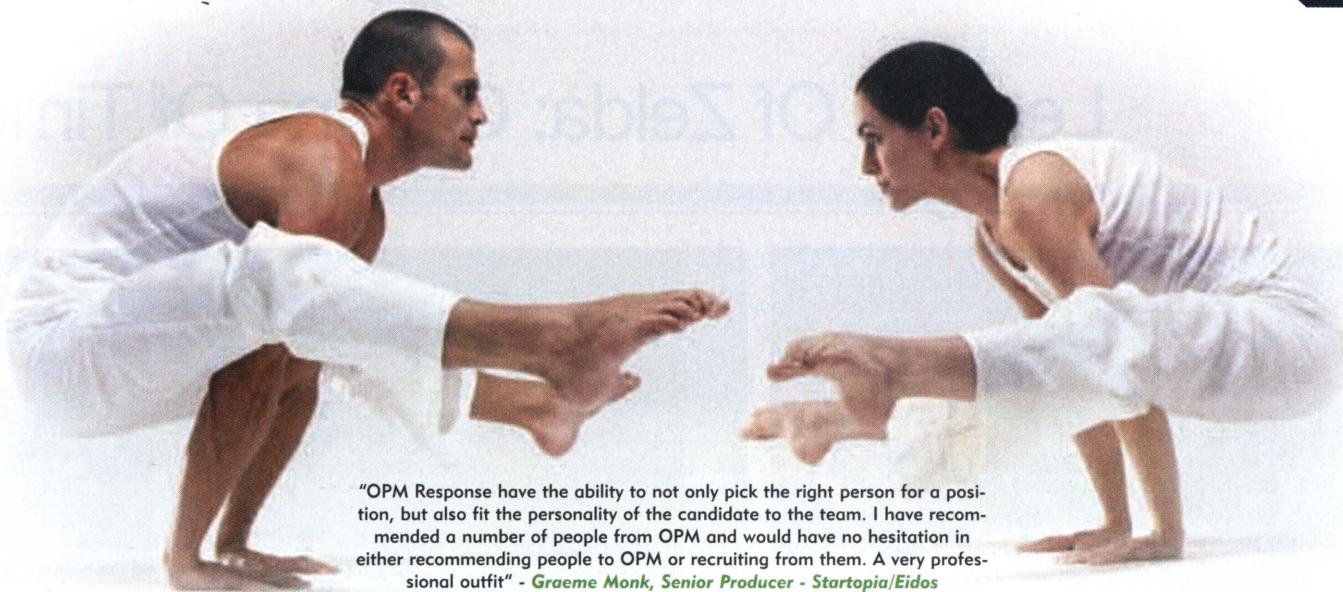
Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

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Experienced 3D animator needed for a film/video animation company moving into games development. Work will involve TV/Film & games animation (100% original titles!) You'll be expected to have a high level of skill and creative flair - previously published or broadcast material is essential. This multi-media operation is currently moving into spacious waterside offices with purpose built CGI facilities (to house extensive postproduction & motion capture facilities). Grab this opportunity to work for an exciting new style of company - wholl not only be making video games for all formats but also creating their own digital, CGI and live action movies.

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London, to £33K ref 1070

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Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

Format: N64 Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1998

The graduation of the *Zelda* series from 2D to 3D is commendable because it retains the essence of what makes the *Zelda* experience unique – an intoxicating blend of exploration, action, puzzle-solving and storytelling now fused with state-of-the-art visuals. It's *Zelda* all right, but it with a new level of creative and technical ambition.

From the title scene, depicting Link astride a galloping horse, to the first person-viewed flightpath of sidekick fairy Navi as she clumsily navigates her way to Link's home, events unfold in this saga with a neatly choreographed, cinematic quality. Beautiful realtime cut-scenes punctuate the game with

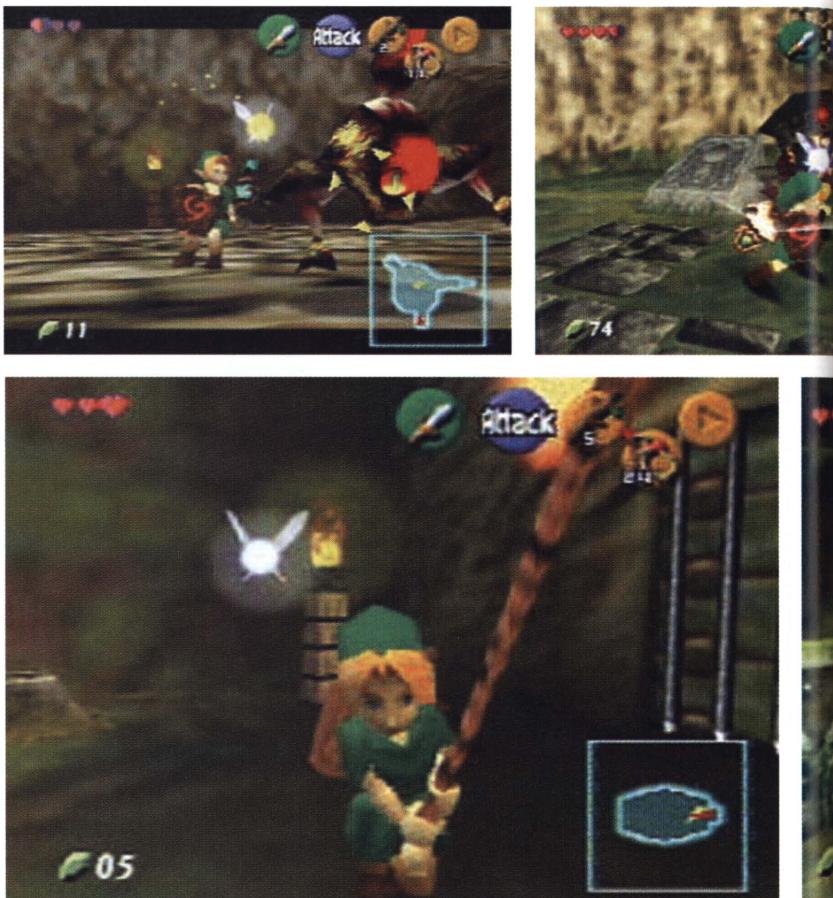
Vast, open expanses, dramatic mountain vistas, and the melting hues of sunrise and sunset combine to make a devastatingly beautiful game

an integrity and seamlessness that throws a considerable shadow over the more incongruous mix of styles in *Final Fantasy VII*.

The upbeat Kokiri forest is the setting for Link's first exploits and works in a similar fashion to *Mario 64*'s castle grounds – as a playpen in which to become acclimated to the controls and interact with the impish inhabitants of the village. Once inside the giant Deku tree you'll quickly discover nuances in the control system such as Link's automatic jumps – a conscious attempt to differentiate the gameplay from *Mario*'s – as well as the intricacies of the combat system, which, while initially daunting, prove well designed and effective.

Aside from regular sword combat, first-person views come into operation when brandishing certain weapons such as the slingshot or bow, or when using items such as the hookshot. However, holding the Z-trigger when close enough to an enemy activates a third-person, locked-on perspective – with strafing a simple matter of moving left or right. This makes simple work of targeting enemies, with a cross hair automatically tracking the nearest foe.

Just as combat is an evolution of that of the 2D series, now making best use of the N64's pad, Nintendo's decision to set the story (a prequel to the series) in two time zones – one when controlling the younger Link and the other when he's matured – can be traced back to the 16-bit *Zelda*'s ingenious light and dark worlds. Time travel between the two zones provides a distinct



The cartridge format has afforded Nintendo's designers many advantages. Areas of Hyrule are streamed in as needed and cut-scenes (announced by the appearance of black borders) are seamlessly evinced

change of tone, with the spirited joiality of the youthful Link cleverly juxtaposed with the darker, weightier challenges he faces later on. Challenge after challenge, the engrossing plot moves along steadily, fuelled by a cast of memorable characters. With around 60 hours of gameplay – and far more if you were to leisurely explore every detail of the gameworld – it is a title of some substance.

Just as the gameplay foundations are flawlessly constructed, the visible world Nintendo has built upon them is majestic in every respect. Replete with flowing rivers, waterfalls, lakes, deserts, towns and virtually any kind of geographical feature you could imagine, Hyrule is a terrifically convincing locale. Vast, open expanses with no pop-up, dramatic mountain vistas, huge, wonderfully shaded enclosures and the melting hues of sunrise and sunset all combine to make this

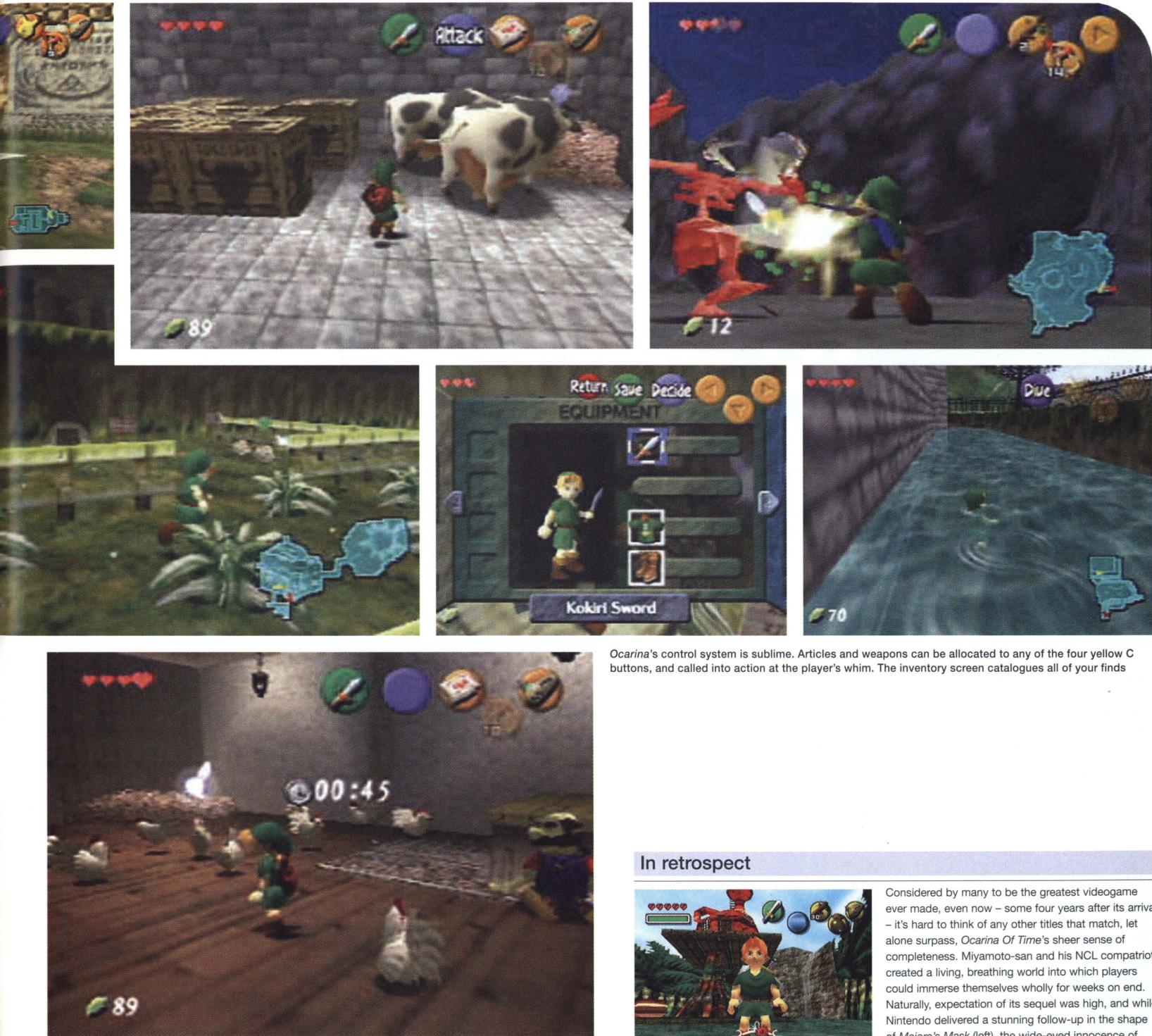
a devastatingly beautiful game.

Everything in *Ocarina Of Time* is realised with an elegance rarely seen in videogames. From the spirited, Disney-esque feel of the proceedings through its pacey storyline, incredible scale and vivid cinematics, nothing has been overlooked in the pursuit of perfection. In fact, the only blots on an otherwise flawless landscape are the occasionally ponderous bouts of text.

That Miyamoto has spent more time on this project than other under-nourished 64-bit updates such as *Mario Kart* and *Yoshi's Story* is more than palpable – *Ocarina Of Time* shapes up as arguably the most accomplished game to have ever come out of NCL, and is reason enough to buy a N64 in itself. A work of genius.



As in Konami's N64 interpretation of *Mystical Ninja*, *Ocarina Of Time* offers an overhead map (above), ensuring that progress is rarely held up



There are many distractions from the quest at hand, including a rich variety of sub-quests and mini-games (here Link is tasked with chasing and catching a particular type of chicken)

Ocarina's control system is sublime. Articles and weapons can be allocated to any of the four yellow C buttons, and called into action at the player's whim. The inventory screen catalogues all of your finds

In retrospect



Considered by many to be the greatest videogame ever made, even now – some four years after its arrival – it's hard to think of any other titles that match, let alone surpass, *Ocarina Of Time*'s sheer sense of completeness. Miyamoto-san and his NCL compatriots created a living, breathing world into which players could immerse themselves wholly for weeks on end. Naturally, expectation of its sequel was high, and while Nintendo delivered a stunning follow-up in the shape of *Majora's Mask* (left), the wide-eyed innocence of Ocarina was gone, in favour of a darker and less forgiving puzzle-solving dungeon explorer.

Half-Life

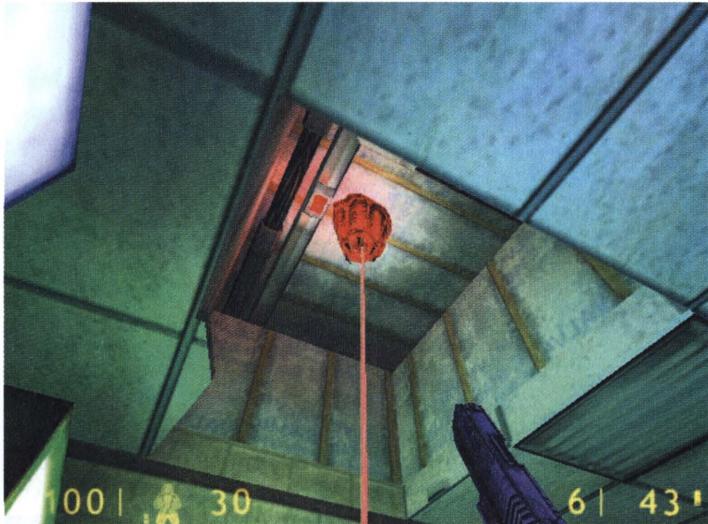
Format: PC Publisher: Sierra Developer: Valve Origin: US Date: 1998

Reviewed in E66



In-game cut-scenes provide the player with clues to progression and timely health warnings that can help you avoid hazards

A stand-off affords the time to admire Valve's skeletal mesh system close up. And particle dispersion algorithms shortly after



In blandly comparative terms, *Half-Life* is a first-person shooter, an offshoot of *Quake* and id's adopt-an-engine scheme. But whereas, in recent times, id has been content to push the technology benchmark, Valve has concentrated on bench-pressing the gameplay. *Half-Life* does not merely stick a shotgun in your hands and line up a procession of polygon-modelled automatons for the slugging. Instead, the title creates a detailed, immersive world, and uses every device at a game designer's disposal to lure the player through to the very end.

The action isn't just dished up, it leaps out. Look down a shaft and a head-hugger will launch at your face. Walk down a corridor and the ceiling will collapse showering you in monsters. Anything that shocks, alarms or surprises is to be applauded, and with *Half-Life* Valve has taken the time to position every creature with Hitchcock-like deviousness.

The action is 'directed'. Dying men breathe their last before you; victims undergo alien transmutations; voices babble for mercy in places you have to enter next; and you're invariably invited into cramped, poorly lit, ghoul-concealing apertures that prompt a 'save game' response. Not since *Doom* has a game provoked such an emotional reaction. And, because you're constantly twisting on the end of drip-fed suspense, the action is all the more piquant on arrival.

So few designers ever bother to deviate from formula, that technological advances have long since outstripped gameplay. The action in most 3D games still occurs on an essentially 2D plane. But here, Valve introduces the roof-barnacle, a hair trigger tongue dangling lazily down from a set of ceiling-fixed teeth, which makes the player appreciate the full implications of 3D space, and thus hone the skill of looking 'up'.

Throughout the game, the creatures demonstrate behavioural quirks. Initially, they are shambling and bestial, prone to pack hunting but not intelligent. Later, though, MENSA monsters and Black Ops troops will lay down suppressive fire, move and try to cut you off; stay still and they'll flush you out with grenades. It's an achievement that goes some way to fulfilling the 'realistic AI' promises that appear mandatory for all game ads today.

Half-Life is a technical and artistic masterpiece. Wreathed in atmosphere and drenched with imagination, the game will devastate all who touch it.

In retrospect

The PC game of the year, without question; conceivably the PC game of all time. But there was some forewarning of future PC gaming policy in Edge's *Half-Life* review: a telling sentence mentioned the instinctive 'save-game response', a reference to the quicksave whose negative impact on *Half-Life* was softened by brilliant design, but that still blights less carefully-crafted titles. The only unfortunate thing from the developer's point of view was timing: Valve's work arrived in the same issue as *Ocarina of Time*, and Link stole much of Freeman's thunder.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Sonic Adventure

Format: Dreamcast Publisher: Sega Developer: Sonic Team Origin: Japan Date: 1999

Reviewed in E68

In every conceivable aspect of the experience it offers, *Sonic Adventure* is a superior piece of interactive entertainment to its peers, although the deep pool of Yen that Sonic Team was given access to has clearly aided the game's development. The title's audio tracks alone were the work of over a dozen musicians, while the final tally of graphic artists is over 50.

Adventure is a thirdperson platformer that follows the story of Sonic as he battles, as in earlier iterations, to defeat arch-adversary Dr Eggman (aka Dr Robotnik in the West), who has created a new menace for the world in the shape of the Chaos monster. This curious concoction is formed from a cocktail of water and 'Chaos Emeralds', and it's these gems that Sonic initially sets out to recover, although Eggman soon turns this to his advantage.

Adventure's plot is, like all stories, linear in structure, but the game avoids tumbling into tedium through three factors. The first of these is the employment of a 'hub-and-spoke' system of level design. The second reason comes in the form of five additional, playable characters – Tails, Knuckles, Amy, Big the Cat and E-102 (a laser-equipped droid). The third factor, meanwhile, is their ability to access a selection of the same levels as Sonic, but to play them in a manner that suits their distinct abilities.

The previous *Sonic* games (which helped to sell Sega's 16bit Mega Drive into millions of homes) have always been about speed, and this new instalment is no exception. There are some breathtaking moments of pace and drama. The level design is also strong, although the best moments, such as the spiralling stone snake in the Lost World or the shifting gravity of the Sky Deck, are left until later areas – it would have been welcome to see some of that inventiveness earlier in the game, rather than a reliance on flinging Sonic around at speed. However, **Edge** is thankful Sega hasn't made the mistake of attempting to turn Sonic into Mario, instead building on what made the previous *Sonic* titles a success and in the process recreating the true feel of a classic 2D platform game in 3D.

Despite the lack of final polishing (Sega had little option but to release *Adventure* before Christmas or face a barrage of bad press), this is a massively ambitious title that manages to deliver a wonderfully absorbing game experience.



Naturally, the collectible golden rings of previous *Sonic* games are present and correct

In retrospect

Yes, it had an unruly camera, but the intricacy and beauty of Sonic's first 128bit adventure made one forgive this major flaw. Levels were designed so that players could tackle them in various ways with different characters (Knuckles, Tails, Amy etc) and they still remain a wonderful example of multi-layered design. Sadly, the game sold relatively poorly. *Sonic Adventure 2* kept the dodgy camera but lost the flair which made the original so captivating.



Fast and furious, Sonic is definitely back. Those expecting more *Mario 64* will be disappointed; those demanding more *Sonic* will not. *Sonic Adventure* is vast in scope and littered with mini-games

Power Stone

Format: Dreamcast | Publisher: Capcom | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 1999

Reviewed in E70



In retrospect

Though Capcom's unique take on the 3D beat 'em up rewarded those patient enough to take the conceptual leap required to savour the intricacies of *Power Stone*, it's likely that **Edge** was perhaps a tad overgenerous with its review. Certainly the game's sequel was actually more refined and enjoyable, and *Soul Calibur* and *Dead or Alive 2* went on to establish an equally viable use of 3D environments. Nevertheless, it remains one of the defining moments in the history of the Dreamcast.



The frenetic beat 'em up play of *Power Stone* has echoes of *Super Smash Bros.* on N64 – but realised in true 3D and with a far greater potential for interaction with objects and the scenery

Ever since the paradigm shift to 3D, fighting titles have struggled to cope with the extra plane of movement. But *Power Stone* is as fluid and controllable as any of its ancestors – if not quite as precise.

It's impossible to prepare for the interactivity on offer in *Power Stone*'s environments. Boxes, tables, chairs, trees benches and urns can be hurled about, while walls, poles and roofs can be swung or hung from. Remembering not to simply punch and kick is the first lesson to learn. The second is the importance of the 'Power Stones' themselves, essentially a power-up system derived from Capcom's *X-Men* series.

Each character starts with one of three coloured gems, which can be beaten from their possession by a reasonably strong attack. A third stone materialises at random points, triggering a dash to capture it. Holding all three activates a super-state with the punch and kick actions metamorphosed into more potent attacks, and the triggers capable of initiating super moves underlined by some showstopping visual effects.

Massively addictive, cleverly realised and simply beautiful to look at, Capcom's *Power Stone* is truly a jewel in Dreamcast's crown.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Silent Hill

Format: PlayStation | Publisher: Konami | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 1999

Reviewed in E70

Unlike *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill* is not an action adventure. It's more psychological; where both *Resident Evil*s make the path of their story explicit, *Silent Hill* has a sweaty, unpredictable and nightmarish quality. The game begins with you regaining consciousness after a car accident. Your daughter left the car while you were out cold and in searching for her you find a gang of zombie children. 3D graphics neatly intercut with FMV as the puzzle-solving odyssey begins.

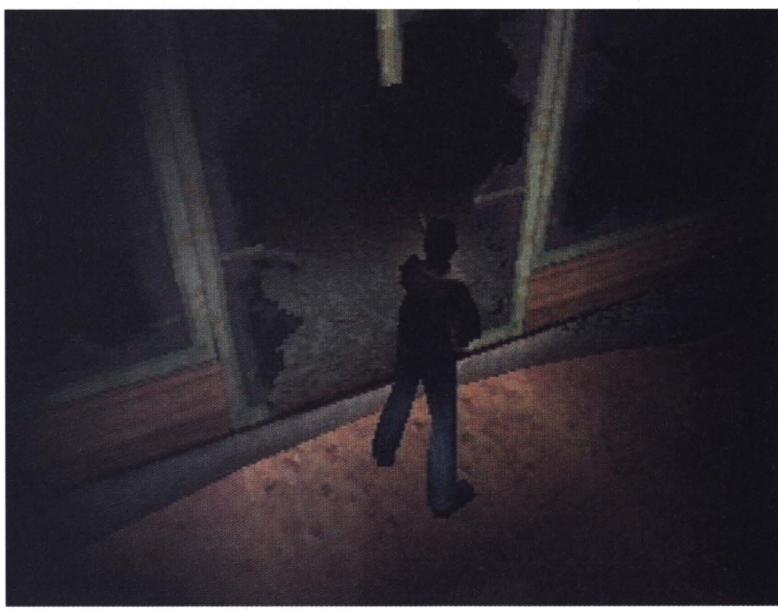
Visually, *Silent Hill* is a cut above other *Tomb Raider*-alikes, offering a broad canvas of varied, detailed environments. Conversely, the range of monsters isn't as disparate as it could be – but then players who want to progress for the sake of meeting and splattering a bunch of increasingly nasty monsters are already well served by any number of other titles.

Sonically too the game is without equal on the PlayStation and *Silent Hill* jangles your nerves with consummate ease. These masterful touches aside, this isn't a universally appealing game. *Silent Hill* is difficult; not in the sense of tricky puzzles and vicious monsters, but in clarity of plot. At once scary, nonsensical, but plausible, it's a scarily fine sim nightmare.



In retrospect

Capcom's *Biohazard* series had already cornered the survival horror market so a fresh approach was required. Konami delivered with a more disturbing and intellectually engaging adventure. Though the plot was impenetrable, branching threads added to the sense of uncertainty and horror. *Silent Hill 2* (above) has fixed some of the control issues of the original and remains as graphic and unnerving as the original.



A much more casual affair than *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill* is no less scarier, relying on tried and trusted horror themes to gradually ramp up the tension. What you can't see is often much more frightening...

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Um Jammer Lammy

Format: PlayStation ■ Publisher: SCEI ■ Developer: NanaOn-Sha ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 1999

Reviewed in E71

You have to admire the surreal absurdity of the *Um Jammer Lammy* world. The situations the eponymous Lammy (guitarist in the band MilkCan) finds herself in as you help her reach the town's concert venue in time for her band's gig are not only ludicrously diverse, but probably only conceptualised with the assistance from rather strong – and possibly illegal – chemicals. The whole experience is a psychedelic voyage into the unexpected; there's little way of knowing where the next challenge is going to take the likeable songstress.

Unfortunately, like its predecessor *PaRappa the Rapper*, the experience is not a particularly long one, with most gamers probably able to reach the final stage in a couple of sittings. Unlike *PaRappa*, however, SCEI has instigated a couple of twoplayer options to inject a little extra life into the experience. You and a friend (or the CPU, should you fail to persuade someone that this is actually a good game despite the lack of polygons) can take part in engagingly cooperative or competitive rounds, which open up progressively alongside advancements made in the oneplayer game.

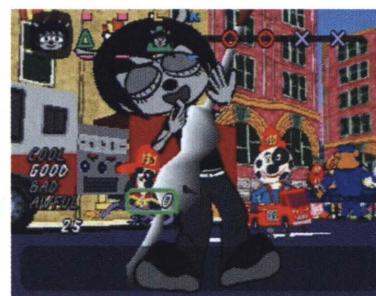
The musical repertoire may be a far cry from the former game's obsession with rap, delving into the realm of funk, pop, rock, and even the unclassifiable. But *Jammer Lammy*'s principle and structure remain identical: you have to match your musical opponent note for word before progression is granted. The reason for the different musical content lies in the fact that rather than singing her way through the levels like *PaRappa*, Lammy relies on her guitar skills as an effective way of repositioning her adversaries' lines. Not only does this enable a more eclectic collection of rockin' tunes to be included, but it also means that effects such as distortion and wah-wah pedals (rewards for successfully completing stages) can be used to add a little variety to the melodic extravaganza.

Ultimately, just like *PaRappa* and *Bust A Move*, *Um Jammer Lammy* cannot hope to match the depth found in most of the more established genres. Nevertheless, it remains an entertaining, occasionally tempting, and altogether mind-boggling alternative for those more naturally drawn to fighting and driving games.



Edge rating:

Six out of ten



In retrospect

The follow up to *PaRappa the Rapper*, SCEI's initial attempt to break the Konami stranglehold on the then-lucrative rhythm action genre, *Lammy* met with critical admiration but (unsurprisingly) little commercial success in the UK. Choosing to introduce a new cast of characters rather than any substantial changes to the dynamic, the development philosophy foreshadowed the conservatism of recently-released sequel proper, *PaRappa 2*. Still, the Japanese popularity of the GreenBlat-illustrated series allowed NanaOn-Sha to produce the innovative and artistic *Vib Ribbon* (above).

The cut-scenes linking one musical challenge to the next contain wonderfully bizarre elements as well as Rodney Greenblat's superb characters

The return of Chop Chop Master Onion, the dojo-owning karate master from the first game, provided one of UJL's stand out lyrical moments: "Kick, punch, you all remember – chop chop back again, yes forever"

Get Bass

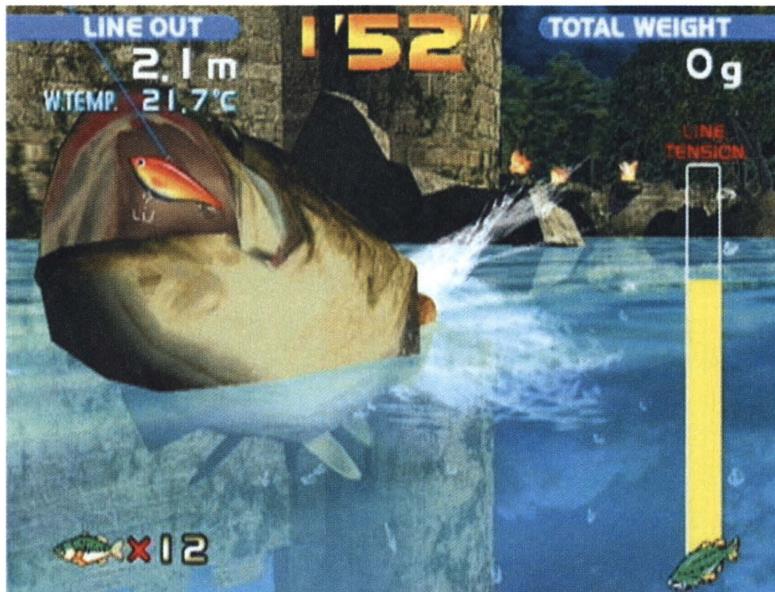
Format: Dreamcast Publisher: Sega Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 1999

Reviewed in E72



In retrospect

There had been fishing games before and there have certainly been some since, of course, but Sega's ingenuity in creating *Get Bass* is demonstrated by the developer's rejection of a simulation-based approach, focusing instead on the most entertaining aspect of the sport – the actual catching of fish. Though quickly derided by those not willing to give it a go, *Get Bass* continually charms new recruits with its alluring blend of carefully tuned gameplay, colourful visuals and proprietary (not to mention accessible) peripheral. And as another example of the Dreamcast's striking software variety, it's beyond criticism.



This is you, 'getting bass'. The enjoyment gleaned from Sega's fishing simulator is multiplied by use of the innovative controller, which replicates the actions of casting and reeling in

As odd an activity as fishing is, it's odder still that someone would want to replicate it within the format of a videogame. Yet, the whole exercise can become rather compulsive. Worryingly so, in fact. You'll actually enjoy developing an understanding of the different lures as well as when (and how) to use them.

Ultimately, there's very little about *Get Bass* that falls within the boundaries of a videogame. After all, its gaming elements are stupefyingly simple; essentially, all you're doing is casting out a lure and reeling it back in, hopefully with a fish in tow, before repeating the sequence. Nevertheless, the fact that more time has been spent playing Sega's fishing title than most other games in the last two months serves as an indication of the state of gameplay values in today's games rather than Edge's desire for something laid-back.

Get Bass' appeal lies in the constant presence of a random element affecting its proceedings – there's no way of predicting the size of the next fish or how many you'll catch, if any. The possibility of landing a record-sized bass with your next cast always proves too tempting an opportunity, resulting in a thoroughly refreshing, enjoyable and addictive experience.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Ape Escape

Format: PlayStation Publisher: SCEI Developer: SCEI Origin: Japan Date: 1999

Reviewed in E74

You could be easily forgiven for thinking a PlayStation platforming project has little chance of being greenlit these days unless it features a level set on the Great Wall of China (together with a slippy-slidey ice world, naturally.) Having made it through SCEI's QA department, *Ape Escape* has both. It also has moving and collapsing platforms, puzzles, collectables and countless other elements that could have been taken straight out of Miyamoto's book on platform gaming.

But *Ape Escape* isn't a simple attempt at cashing in on the *Mario 64* phenomenon. In many respects it's a brave title. Like *Spyro*, *Ape Escape* is undeniably aimed at the younger gamer: initial levels are full of helpful messages that experienced players will undoubtedly find annoyingly intrusive. Yet, there is a good pace to the proceedings. The various stages are sufficiently distinct from each other, offering increasingly difficult challenges, while most of the weapons are genuinely innovative. Sneaking up on a monkey to slam your special capturing net over it is remarkably satisfying.

While not essential, the overall package offers enough novelty to make it worth considering for anyone tired of the many me-too platformers.



In retrospect

Sony had just developed its dual analogue controller and needed a game to exploit its virtues. *Ape Escape* was that game, and it used every function on the pad. But this game was more than mere novelty, blending imaginative gameplay styles with charming characterisation. The chance to operate radio-controlled cars and stun monkeys with a slingshot were deft touches sadly missing from the recently-reviewed sequel, *Ape Escape 2001*.



Capturing AWOL monkeys has rarely been so much fun. Yes, the graphical glitches are part of the package, but they don't interfere with the gameplay. Diverse level design keeps interest level high

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Driver

Format: PlayStation Publisher: GT Interactive Developer: Reflections Origin: UK Date: 1999

Reviewed in E75

Driver is a very accomplished title, if not the astounding experience it originally promised to be. It's unfortunate to discover that the opportunity to assume the role of a criminal, as promised when **Edge** first showcased *Driver* in E62, has vanished, leaving you impersonating an undercover cop. It makes little difference to the game, but it remains a sad indication of the threat of sanitisation that looms large over game developers' heads.

Beginning in Miami, successful completion of your missions sees you challenge the local traffic law enforcement in San Francisco, Los Angeles and, finally, New York. The locales may differ but, regrettably, the essence of your tasks doesn't. It's usually a case of driving from A to B – to pick up criminals, drop off illegal goods or deliver stolen vehicles – while avoiding the police and chasing and ramming rivals, then heading from B to A – usually fleeing from the authorities as you attempt to reach a safe-house on the other side of town.

Occasionally diversity does rear its head, such as the mission requiring you to take the role of a cab driver and scare an informant into submission through your reckless driving. But this is preciously rare. While the police cannot physically arrest you, as they can in GTA for example, they'll do a good job of transforming your car into a mashed-up wreck if you let them catch up with you.

Nevertheless, there is a lot of entertainment to be had with *Driver*. Executing a perfectly timed powerslide around a 90-degree bend, horn blasting, weaving in and out of the cities' rush-hour traffic, narrowly missing civilian vehicles only to witness the pursuing police car fail to do the same – it can be immensely satisfying.

Simply put, no other game offers you the chance to faithfully recreate the adrenaline-triggering car chases favoured by countless '70s movies – to the accompaniment of a funk-laden soundtrack. Reflections has also included a number of additional modes to keep interest levels high, and while these fail to match the appeal of the main game, their appearance at all, given the game's notorious production schedule, is worthy of note.

Driver presses all of the right buttons, marrying real-world and movie components to often thrilling effect. Bar its propensity to crash, and some repetitious gameplay, this is tremendous stuff.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten



In retrospect

Reflections' first effort to recreate a convincing working city, complete with traffic lights, pedestrians, cafes and police roadblocks was executed supremely well. Likewise, the handling of the vehicles was implemented with great aplomb. It was an important title, too, for console gamers who hadn't sampled the delights of Midtown Madness. Lamentably, the sequel (in which the hero could exit vehicles) was just too ambitious resulting in shocking slowdown and poor draw distance.

The way *Driver* manages to capture all of the fundamental elements of the traditional '70s movie-style car chase is remarkable – just don't expect too much variety from the gameplay

Soul Calibur

Format: Dreamcast | Publisher: Namco | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 1999

Reviewed in E76



In retrospect

Arguably, *Soul Calibur* has yet to be matched in terms of graphics by any other next-gen title. Yet it wasn't just that the game's visuals made a mockery of the hitherto disingenuous 'arcade perfect' tag. The game's sublime nuance of control, comprehensive move list, and far-reaching reward structure built on that of its predecessor *Soul Edge*, and refined them in every way, producing an experience to be savoured. It's just a shame that, owing to the 18 certificate, the game's breathtaking splendour couldn't be used to promote the Dreamcast to an uncaring audience.



If anyone needed assurance that the Dreamcast was a potent gaming platform, *Soul Calibur* surely is it. The wealth of moves, sublime animation and solid, 3D arenas are simply a joy to behold.

Although both *Soul Edge* and *Soul Calibur* were created for Sony's System-series arcade hardware, Namco's consumer development team has eschewed those boards' relative limitations and worked to DC specifications. The result is simply beautiful, with motion capture, lighting, character interaction, and attention to detail unlike anything seen before.

It's likely that reasonably experienced gamers will battle through the arcade mode in a few short hours; far less possible is that they'll begin to master the subtle nuances of each character, not least because of the 80-plus moves each has to offer. As in *Tekken 2* and *3*, these are listed within the game's pause menu, and range from single swipes to extensive combos. While several key moves are shared across the various fighters, the resultant action can be vastly different.

Few games scream at you to play them, stealing away days without you even caring. *Soul Calibur* is one such title. Gather a few friends together and you're transported back to the early days of the PlayStation and endless *Tekken* bouts, transfixed by a vision of the future. Just as it did when 32bit arrived, Namco has once more defined a new videogame era.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Unreal Tournament

Format: PC | Publisher: GT Interactive | Developer: Epic | Origin: US | Date: 1999

Reviewed in E76

While most developers are trying to bulk out their game narrative, first-person shooters are perversely hell-bent on heading in the opposite direction, where only fragging requires your attention.

Structured around the online experience, each level of the singleplayer game throws you against a variety of computer-controlled bots. Beginning with one-on-one, the number of opponents rises steadily. The only objective is to be the first to a certain amount of kills. And while Epic has crafted its usual beautiful environments, with re-skinning weaponry, excellent level design and streamlined online playability, the question remains: how good is the bots' AI? The answer, sadly, is better than before, but still not sophisticated enough.

However, the one saving grace is the Practice mode. This enables you to customise level settings, and it's here the game shines. The number of bots can be chosen, as well as their characteristics, the level of friendly fire and even gravity. And although it's unlikely to withstand the assault of *Quake III*, especially in the online stakes, *Unreal Tournament* will definitely fill the gap. Even if it doesn't entirely validate the concept of the bot deathmatch.



In retrospect

Released just before *Quake III: Arena*, *Unreal Tournament* marked the transition from single player FPS progression to multiplayer mayhem. Everything was focused on honing skills for epic frag sessions and abandoned narrative in favour of arena warfare. 'Bots' were becoming ever more fashionable and the game's AI (unsuccessfully) attempted to mimic the unpredictability of 'real life' opponents. Painfully basic by today's standards, *UT* still remains a significant release in the history of videogames.



Forget aliens, *Unreal Tournament* is about fragging humanoids in multiplayer mode. Shields and weapon power-ups are crucial to boosting your frag count. The Shield Belt takes your armour to its maximum level

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Tony Hawk's Skateboarding

Format: PlayStation | Publisher: Activision | Developer: Neversoft | Origin: US | Date: 1999

Reviewed in E77

For those who don't know, Tony Hawk is the skateboarding world's equivalent of Ayrton Senna. Not in the sense of speed or that he's no longer alive, of course, rather in terms of pure, natural ability. Once on a skateboard, the man is untouchable.

Now, having the top personality within a particular sport endorse a videogame is certainly no guarantee that the game will be up to scratch. It can easily go either way: *Colin McRae Rally* was a pleasant surprise, while, ironically (and sadly), Ayrton Senna's *Kart Duel 2* wasn't. No reason for scepticism on this occasion, though, for this is one of those rare success stories: *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* is great fun.

Naturally, you get the chance to pick more than just Hawk before going off to grind the vertices of the local neighbourhood's environment. Each of the nine skaters on offer is also a star from the real world, possessing strengths in different areas. After a little trial and error, then, you're bound to find one that best suits your style.

The game begins with only the training arena open and predictably the other eight courses become accessible progressively. To do this you must earn videotapes (videos detailing the exploits of the world's best skaters being hot property among their followers). Every time-limited stage has five tapes available – two for reaching specific score barriers, one for a specific task (knocking over five 'No Skateboarding' signs, for example), one hidden, and one for collecting the letters S, K, A, T and E.

The array of tricks on offer is impressive and although initially daunting, you'll soon be pulling some rewarding manoeuvres with ease. Real-life skaters will love the way they can apply their knowledge with genuine results. But the beauty of *Tony Hawk's Skateboarding* is the way that anyone can derive enjoyment from it – which makes its faults all the more annoying. Put simply, the PlayStation cannot handle the environments Neversoft has asked it to draw without the odd polygon break-up, and this immediately affects the suspension of disbelief. There's just no way your surroundings feel as solid as those of, say, *1080°* on the N64. Also, unlike Nintendo's game, the control system is not as fluid as it might have been.

But until something better comes along, this is easily the finest skateboarding game around.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Even though Hawk takes top billing, there are a number of other skaters available to the player. The game also offers up a welcome mixture of urban settings and dedicated skate parks

In retrospect

Perhaps the mark was a tad harsh considering the enduring appeal of the polished grind/trick combo system. But the graphical imperfections let an otherwise excellent package down. Neversoft probably couldn't believe its luck when the game became a global success. The formula has been refined with subsequent iterations but there are few surprises in the latest, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* on PS2.

System Shock 2

Format: PC Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Looking Glass Origin: US Date: 1999

Reviewed in E77



Although the monster models – like those of *Thief* – are not particularly well animated or defined, the audio effects that accompany their arrival can make them genuinely alarming. *System Shock 2* can be thoroughly eerie.

In retrospect

Evolving psychological terror within videogames to the extent that some players had problems making it all the way through, Edge's description of *System Shock 2* as "the game that *Aliens vs Predator* perhaps should have been" was uncannily accurate. Indeed, Argonaut's *Alien Resurrection* would be the next game to prove quite as terrifying, but it was *Shock*'s intelligence that really made the game, and carved an ethic that became the driving force behind *Deus Ex*. Though Looking Glass closed in 2000, its legacy lives on in every intelligent firstperson shooter, in every game that requires subtlety of thought over click-test reactions.

System Shock 2's Psi device allows players to use a wide range of abilities. Think *Jedi Knight*'s Force abilities, only more so. The empty slots in the inventory panel hint at the game's RPG elements

Certain games, despite critical acclaim and innovative design, fail to pique the curiosity of the buying public. The original *System Shock* was one such title, lauded by the PC press, yet widely ignored at retail.

It's hard to pinpoint quite why it happened – it did, after all, pre-empt *Half-Life*'s narrative-oriented progression, and was at least as atmospheric as Delphine's similarly paced *Fade To Black*. Many gamers, then, will mistake *System Shock 2* as a child of the current era – the post-*Half-Life* switch from 'twitch' gameplay to more involving firstperson adventures – when, in fact, its precursor was a pioneer of this gamestyle.

System Shock 2's RPG leanings are revealed during its opening sequences, just after players have ploughed through short training sequences. You're given the option to choose your career path prior to the beginning of the game proper. Although you do not actually play through these events, the behind-the-scenes experience they confer enhances your starting statistics. From weapon-handling to making repairs, and Psi abilities to basic physical characteristics, these skills may then be enhanced further during your later adventures. The importance of this aspect of *System Shock 2* cannot be understated, as balancing your character's faculties is essential.

Many gamers, with their *Quake*-tinged sensibilities, will be shocked at how awkward combat can be in *System Shock 2*. You point, you shoot and – clumsily, it must be said – you strafe. However, the relative vulnerability of your character adds an exhilarating air to proceedings. Ammunition is forever scarce, and the strength of your assailants grows in accordance with your own. There are, however, difficult sections where play continues in a staccato manner, while long reloads test the patience. *System Shock 2*'s razor-edged atmosphere does not come without a price.

With a tightly scripted plot, great audio, and measured, challenging progression, *System Shock 2* is a far from typical FPS outing. Its engine is not at the cutting edge of PC graphics but, grasping the baton from its lamentably overlooked forebear, it succeeds in offering an advanced, progressive spin on firstperson gaming mainstays. With all due respect to Rebellion, this is the game that *Aliens Vs Predator* perhaps should have been.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Bakuretsu Muteki Bangaioh

Format: N64 | Publisher: ESP | Developer: Treasure | Origin: Japan | Date: 1999

Reviewed in E79

Looking like the bastard offspring of Masaya's SNES mecha shooter *Assault Suits Valken* and Thalamus' C64 puzzle blast *Hunter's Moon*, the objective of *Bangaioh*'s numerous levels is remarkably straightforward: get the titular mecha through each timed level and face whatever boss awaits you. Tactically, you can either go the high score route, demolishing the buildings that cling to every surface (the score counter resets after each round) and collect yourself a fruit salad, or make a dash to the finish.

The resulting action can only be described as manic as the screen fills with enemies, hordes of trailing missiles, explosions and shrapnel. Initially it may be hard to identify *Bangaioh*'s appeal. It's only when the levels start to diversify and alternate between puzzles, mazes and open field blast-outs does the game really come alive. The only thing between success and failure is the player's prowess with *Bangaioh*'s controls.

Limited to a 10,000-cartridge run in Japan, Treasure has once again shown that an utter disregard for gaming trends can still reap rewards. It does put up a pretty good defence for the argument that the old days of gaming were better.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



In retrospect

Edge never got round to reviewing the DC version of *Bakuretsu Muteki Bangaioh* (released over here as *Bangai-o*). Which is a shame, because it essentially reworked and refined the N64 original to produce a thrillingly original blend of shoot 'em up dynamics and puzzle game mechanics. A beautifully precise learning curve and an initially counter-intuitive, but ultimately rewarding, emphasis on placing your craft in precarious circumstances to unleash a bombastic counterattack, were just the icing on a particularly sumptuous cake.

Chu-Chu Rocket

Format: Dreamcast | Developer: Sega | Publisher: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 2000

Reviewed in E80



In retrospect

It's telling that Edge's review concentrates almost entirely on the multiplayer aspects of *Chu-Chu Rocket*. Given away free to those who registered with Sega's Internet Service Provider, Dream Arena, it was the DC's first attempt at getting users involved in online competition. Crucially, though, it wasn't available at launch, and while the frantic experience proved compelling, the idea of directing cats and mice around a maze didn't prove intriguing to many gamers. But the concept was sound, and if only six billion players had got to play it...

The simple graphics belie a game fraught with anxiety. Not until the final whistle has blown can you tell if you've succeeded in beating your fellow players or not...

The concept behind *Chu-Chu Rocket* is simple – guide as many mice into your rocket as you can within the time allocated. Whoever has the largest amount of mice when the counter reaches zero wins.

Oneplayer mode offers a series of puzzle-based boards for you to clear, or the opportunity to play the main game against CPU opponents. There are other elements to contend with, of course. Cats wander around the board eating up mice, and should a feline step aboard your rocket then the number of mice it consumes is immediately taken off your total. There are bonus mice, too, offering players the chance to radically redress the balance of total mice captured.

But absolutely nothing compares with the thrill of competing against human opponents. Either in teamplay (two-on-two) or in a fourplayer free-for-all, *Chu-Chu Rocket* is utterly addictive. It's also one of the most frantic videogaming episodes you're ever likely to engage in. Everything hangs in the balance until the very end – whether you're leading or trailing there's no guarantee that your fortunes will not have U-turned by the time the whistle blows.

This is gaming excellence in its purest form.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

The Sims

Format: PC Publisher: EA Developer: Maxis Origin: US Date: 2000

Reviewed in E82



The Sims redefines the 'kitchen sink drama'. The house can be viewed in various levels of undress, and also rotated to provide the ideal action view

In retrospect

Will Wright's empire is expanding at an extraordinary rate, fuelled in no small part by EA (which has always been happy to promulgate a promising franchise). Expansions now allow your Sims to be abducted by aliens, perform diabolical chemistry experiments and participate in saucy under-the-sheet activity. Some might ridicule the game for becoming the housewives' favourite, but *The Sims* does tap into those precious gameplay commodities of power and voyeurism better than any other title. And for that it should be applauded.



A typical Sim family unit. It's hard to keep solitary Sims alive; they're social beasts and you'll find that they tend to pine for company. Equally, they can just end up broke

The Sims approaches the *Sim City* franchise from the other end of the scale, focusing on the tiny citizens and their suburban castles. The result – a simulation of people with their family feuds – is brilliant.

The game succeeds by keeping the simulation's scope reignited. Sims don't talk. They burble with *Theme Park*-style pictorial bubbles. You don't see them at work. The game doesn't over reach itself in trying to create a computerised 'Brookside'. What you've got is an infinitely versatile house construction kit which in itself devours hours, plus a neat representation of the daily lives of whoever you put in there. You focus on the environment, building Sims' houses and buying things with their wages. You can order them about, but if you're not on their wavelength they'll usually refuse, looking straight at you and shaking their heads with a plaintive 'uh-uh'.

Watching their encounters is highly engrossing. Great technology makes it all possible. Top-drawer game AI motivates *The Sims*. Brilliant animation and a masterclass in the use of sound smooths over any loose edges. Recall the stupid routes your units take in even the most recent RTS games and you'll realise why Maxis' path-finding AI is a huge achievement. Here's a game where you can build a house of any shape, fill it with bric-a-brac and then call half a dozen Sims around to party and they can still negotiate each other to get a beer from the fridge. The odd stand-off in a kitchen doorway is the exception, proving the rules work.

Theoretically – although it's not apparent for many hours – *The Sims* is actually somewhat limited. Maxis has played it too straight with the body types and personalities, while the toys run out sooner than you'd expect. *The Sims*' Web site will help, offering hundreds of downloadable objects and new Sims, plus the tools to create them – though that's not much comfort to PC users without access to the Internet.

But perhaps any gripes can be put down to 'Oliver Twist' syndrome – you always want more. All things considered, it's better to see *The Sims* out a year after its E3 debut. It is one of the freshest experiences available on any platform. It's fun to play and instructive. Other developers should get out their notepads, too, for Maxis has unearthed a host of design gems in this, its most essential release since the original *Sim City*.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Crazy Taxi

Format: Dreamcast | Publisher: Sega | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 2000

Reviewed in E82

Despite playing *Crazy Taxi* obsessively for a couple of days when the preview code arrived at **Edge**'s office, weeks passed with no one bothering to load up Sega's cabby simulator again.

Now the review version has arrived at **Edge**'s HQ, once again many hours have been spent ferrying demanding customers around masterfully rendered city environments – the second, Dreamcast-only level now running as swiftly and smoothly as its arcade-originating counterpart. Both are tremendous in scope and offer an abundance of locale variation, shortcuts, and secret passageways as well as hordes of potential customers lining their many thoroughfares. These are colour-coded (green for longer journeys through to red for shortest) allowing you to inject a little strategy into planning your journeys.

Mastering power sliding (Crazy Drift) and turbo-boosting (Crazy Dash) your way around town should ensure that your customers will reach their destinations in record time. This not only ensures higher fares (the longer you take, the less you earn) but more seconds remain to pick up another taxi-seeking pedestrian. As well as playing along to arcade rules (rapid passenger delivery boosts the time limit and hence keeps you in play) you have the option of selecting fixed time modes (three, five or ten minutes). It's an easy way to balance game time if a group of you is playing.

There are no prizes for guessing that the finished game is a lot of fun. After all, *Crazy Taxi*'s premise makes perfect videogame fodder. Despite the game's initial impact, however, it's not quite the triumph some have already termed it. At times, for example, gameplay can spill over into the realms of the preposterously frantic, robbing you of solid play. A more serious issue is the reality that, even with the extra city and 16 mini-games thrown in, the game is incapable of delivering depth on a significant scale. It is, therefore, a title suited to casual play rather than concerted, weeks-on-end entertainment.

There's absolutely no doubting *Crazy Taxi*'s stellar quality as a coin-op conversion. Like *House Of The Dead 2* and *Zombie Revenge* before it, though, it suffers longevity shortfalls. Restrict play time to short bursts and you'll get along fine.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten



In retrospect

The only criticism was a lack of depth, and perhaps the soundbite which marked the gameplay as "preposterously frantic", but that was still too much for some Dreamcast owners. If there was one review that lit the anti-**Edge** fuel scattered around the Sega community, this was it. Fanboys were inflamed, the placid insisting the game warranted at least an Eight, and the aggressive blaming the mark for the death of the DC itself. But hey, there's always a bright side: Sega's newly multiformat nature proved just how desirable the title is, with conversions and sequels running across the next-generation consoles, and a recently announced PC port.

Crazy Taxi's coin-op heritage is obvious from the simplicity of its gameplay. Pick up customers, follow the green arrow to the specified destination, stop and let the customer disembark. Repeat

Soldier Of Fortune

Format: PC Publisher: Activision Developer: Raven Software Origin: US Date: 2000

Reviewed in E84

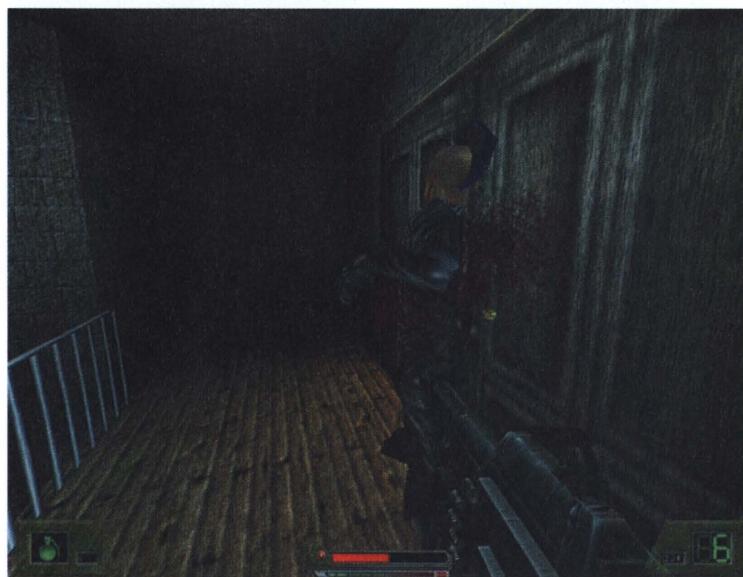


The plentiful supply of ammunition results in a limited use of the trusty Pig Sticker combat knife. Though an effective weapon, it is not as satisfying as the more pyrotechnic variety



In retrospect

The likes of *Kingpin* and *Conker's Bad Fur Day* (reviewed in issue 75 and 96, respectively) attest to the willingness of the videogame industry to embrace the schlocky and the gruesome in order to engineer a controversy that might drum up sales. *Soldier Of Fortune* is still a reasonably decent firstperson shooter, but it's difficult not to suspect that the game's emphasis on cartoon morality and shocking gore betrays a certain lack of imagination.



The sniper rifle (above right) is essential to Mullins given his constant need to avert attention, and also considering that most of the other weapons deal destruction in a grossly exaggerated manner

Despite its emphasis on blood and gore, the latest outing for the *Quake II* engine brings back memories of those other soldiers of fortune, The A-Team – if no one else can help, and if you can find him, maybe you can hire: John Mullins. As befits the right-wing, pro-gun agenda, the rather weak plot involves four nuclear warheads that have been stolen by a terrorist. The UN has seen fit to employ a lone individual to destroy these warheads, which is where the player comes in.

Cinematic cut-scenes introduce the action, which takes place in several hotspots all over the world, from Kosovo to Iraq via New York. After the introductory levels, Mullins is assigned his new missions by two compatriots: Hawk Parsons and Sam Gladstone. At key moments, Parsons makes a pre-rendered appearance introducing new objectives, or opening up a new area for Mullins to explore. Excellent graphics and a first-rate use of audio are evident from the early levels, set in a well-realised New York subway station, and serve to heighten the immersive sense of atmosphere and tension.

Also immediately obvious is the graphic depiction of violence. In a wise move, a parental lock can moderate the gore, but even with this disabled, a range of pseudo-realistic weaponry can blow the bad guys, literally, to pieces. However, the new lean command, in combination with the woefully inadequate enemy AI, will result in the sniper rifle being the weapon of choice for many players. Although the use of stealth is *de rigueur* right now, it requires the suspension of a large amount of disbelief to consider it possible to lean around a corner and take out a group of sentries standing only yards away, one by one. And yet throughout the game, battle-hardened mercenaries will react to somebody in the near vicinity being shot in the head by standing still. As the game develops, the threat increases by waves of attack that are triggered by the player's progress or proximity to a certain location, but this is a poor shortcut to alleviate deficient AI.

SOF is an above-average firstperson shooter. It doesn't bring much to the genre, save for its gory depiction of violence. Indeed, while the game is no more violent than any other game of its ilk, the combination of B-movie plot, cannon-fodder AI, reductive morality, pseudo-realistic setting and exaggerated violence is alarming, even in a title aimed at a mature audience.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Dead Or Alive 2

Format: Dreamcast/PlayStation2 Publisher: Tecmo Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 2000

Reviewed in E84

Wether or not you consider it to be in good taste, it will please some people that *Dead Or Alive 2* continues the original's celebration of the natural glories displayed by the game's female stars. Eagle-eyed players will notice that the emphasis has slightly shifted to the underwear of the schoolgirlish combatants.

But more significant are the involving and balletic contests at the heart of the game. The control system is intuitive, with a button each for punch and kick, as well as a third button that combines for holds and counters. At times it is simply a joy to watch the elegant exchanges between fighters.

Featuring multi-tiered, interactive environments akin to *Power Stone*, with more complex manoeuvres reminiscent of *Soul Calibur*, the game marks another step towards a true 3D beat 'em up.

There is little to distinguish between the two versions in terms of gameplay. While Sony's console offers more luxuriant lighting effects, the animation is equally fluid on Sega's. The fact that the latter has fewer arenas and requires more concerted oneplayer effort to unlock costumes is critical, though, and is hardly outweighed by providing schoolgirl uniforms.



Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



In retrospect

Amid the disappointment of the likes of *Ridge Racer V* and *Tekken Tag Tournament*, *Dead Or Alive 2* stood out as an example of what PlayStation2 could actually achieve when the console was launched. The thing is, it also bore testimony to the capabilities of the Dreamcast, and it was difficult, at the time, to spot the difference, despite Sony's grandiloquent promises. Though a sequel has since emerged that showcases the abilities of Xbox, it's worth pointing out that *DOA2* was beguilingly enjoyable as well as technically accomplished.

While the basic gameplay is the same in both versions, PS2 owners are treated to different outfits and more arenas. The DC version boasts the viewing pleasure of Kasumi and Ayane in school uniforms

Fantavision

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: SCEI Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 2000

Reviewed in E84



In retrospect

Predictably skipped over by the public in favour of *Tekken Tag*'s stodgy delights, *Fantavision*'s spectacular puzzle mechanic proved as beautiful and timeless as it was clever. The delicately balanced difficulty curve made the experience, and watching an expert play is enough to counter criticisms that success could be attained through pure luck. Those who'd played it as much as it deserved found that, come November 5, they'd instinctively try and link up the sky-burst colour, as good a sign as any that a game's got inside your head.

On the surface, *Fantavision* is beautifully simplistic: waves of blue, green and orange fireworks are fired into the night sky and it's your role to link them together before detonating them. In reality it's harder than that. You must link a minimum of three, always according to colour and you do this by attaching a multicoloured firework between them.

Although colour-based firework-linking in *Fantavision* works in multiples of three, there's nothing to stop you from joining any number of similarly coloured fireworks together. So you could have four green, followed by three orange and five blue, for instance. And as you're working on what's already in the air, you're also keeping an eye on the next wave of fireworks that is shown at the bottom of the screen. In addition to fireworks popping up, stars, bonus points and energy icons make an occasional appearance, too.

Simple enough, you conclude. Shallow, even. Before you know it, though, hours have passed, yet the 'one more go' factor remains firmly in place. Impressively powered by Sony's 128bit machine, this along with DC's *Chu Chu Rocket*, ranks among the most charmingly endearing and playable, too.



It may not push PlayStation2 to its technical boundaries (backdrops are not made up of zillions of polygons), but *Fantavision* is a visually engaging experience and deserves huge success

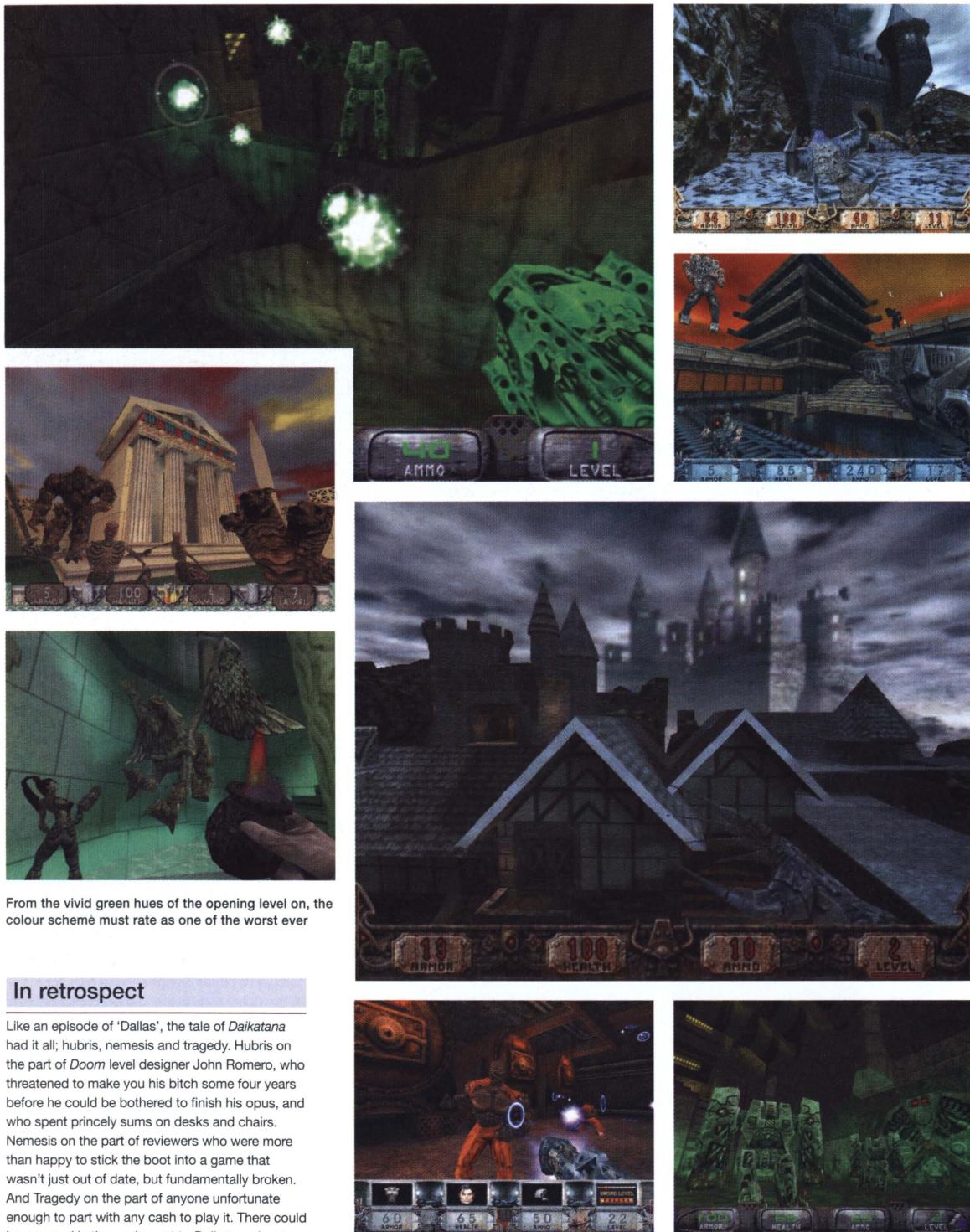
Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Daikatana

Format: PC Publisher: Eidos Developer: Ion Storm Origin: US Date: 2000

Reviewed in E86



From the vivid green hues of the opening level on, the colour scheme must rate as one of the worst ever

In retrospect

Like an episode of 'Dallas', the tale of *Daikatana* had it all; hubris, nemesis and tragedy. Hubris on the part of Doom level designer John Romero, who threatened to make you his bitch some four years before he could be bothered to finish his opus, and who spent princely sums on desks and chairs. Nemesis on the part of reviewers who were more than happy to stick the boot into a game that wasn't just out of date, but fundamentally broken. And Tragedy on the part of anyone unfortunate enough to part with any cash to play it. There could be a sequel in the works; not to *Daikatana*, but to the story of Romero, who claims to be making a *Zelda*-beater for the PDA market.

Dull textures, limited AI, uninspiring weapons and annoying level design conspire with the aged Quake II engine to render *Daikatana* a real disappointment

After three years in the pipeline, John Romero's labour of love has finally emerged from development hell. Set in the 24th Century, *Daikatana*'s storyline follows the adventures of futuristic Samurai Hiro Miyamoto as he travels between four distinct time periods. Each period (future Japan, ancient Greece, Dark Ages Norway and San Francisco in 2030) contains up to six levels, which are divided into three more manageable sub-levels. The game begins in Japan, where Hiro finds himself in a marsh. It's from here that *Daikatana* starts to go downhill.

Level design and enemy AI are the most immediate problems. From the outset the player is presented with a ridiculously high proportion of blind alleys to explore – a problem that is addressed as the game progresses, but the design feels almost random in nature. The first adversaries Hiro encounters are frogs and insects – not creatures likely to strike terror into your heart – and while the foes increase in size later on, their brains clearly don't grow in accordance.

Despite these fundamental difficulties, *Daikatana* does have some innovative features. The most significant of these are the 'sidekicks', which take the helpful characters of *Half-Life* and *Kingpin* a few steps further. Commands to acquire objects, attack enemies or to stay put can be issued. Sadly, this too becomes tiresome as you have to keep your allies alive or it's game over – which, given their suicidal behaviour, can be tough.

Another interesting touch is the way Hiro's skills and abilities grow as you progress. Experience can be channelled towards different areas – Attack, Power (damage), Speed, Acro (jumping ability), and Vitality – improving your performance. This concept also applies to Hiro's sword, the *Daikatana*, which 'learns' how to kill different enemies the more it's used. Other weapons range from the powerful Staff of Zeus, Shockwave and Sun Flare, to the more ineffectual Ion Blaster and Discus. However, using the more powerful arms in the close environments of the game usually results in death for you or your feckless sidekicks.

Daikatana looks and plays like a game well past its sell-by date – the Quake II engine it is based on shouldn't be exposed to such rigours at its age. And while it would have been impossible to live up to the expectation John Romero himself perpetuated, *Daikatana* simply doesn't cut it.

Edge rating:

Four out of ten

Samba De Amigo

Format: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: In-house ■ Origin: Japan ■ Date: 2000

■ Reviewed in E86

In light of Sega's third consecutive financial loss, designing a pair of maracas equipped with motion-sensor technology would appear to be something of an indulgence. As would releasing another Bemani title in the west after the genre's poor performance to date. But after playing Sega's near perfect conversion of coin-op hit *Samba De Amigo* for just a short time it would seem to make perfect sense, and it would be a shame to deny gamers the opportunity to get their hands on such a compelling title.

The basic premise of *Samba De Amigo* is simple: the aforementioned peripherals must be shaken in time with a selection of tunes ranging from the 'Macarena' to a heavy rock version of A-ha's classic 'Take on Me'. Graphics consisting of six coloured circles inform the player of the height and position at which the maracas must be shaken. High scores are awarded for consistent rhythmical accuracy, while successive blunders are penalised by the premature end of the melody. This in itself is an enormously satisfying one-player experience, but with friends it becomes positively riotous, with increasingly difficult songs requiring you to set aside of any semblance of reserve as you adopt a series of outlandish poses.

Such uncomplicated gameplay possesses a surprising amount of longevity, but Yuji Naka has also gone to the trouble of implementing a design structure that encourages continued play. The basic play mode features several stages that allow you to choose a tune, with high scores rewarded by new songs being unlocked. There is also a sort of campaign mode in which certain scores must be obtained in order to progress, and a series of two-player modes. A co-operative 'Love Love' mode awards a score based on the degree to which two players shake in unison, while in contrast the object of a competitive game is to diminish your opponent's health bar by sustaining a rhythm long enough to send over a bomb. There is also a series of mini-games, such as a variant of Simon Says, and a game in which boulders must be destroyed by sustained shaking.

Samba De Amigo will probably appeal most to grizzled hardcore gamers, but it is a game that everyone should have a chance to enjoy. Like some kind of demented version of Twister, it deserves to usher in a new paradigm for parlour games.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Samba's gameplay is beautifully straightforward: the red, yellow and green circles represent the heights at which you shake your maracas. Successfully maintaining your rhythm unlocks more tunes

Occasionally you're asked to perform a specific move, and you only have an instant to get it right



In retrospect

The game which launched a million eBay bids, *Samba's* arrival wasn't enough to save the Dreamcast, but the limited quantities of the unique peripheral made sure it was one of the most in-demand games of recent times. Drawing on the physical philosophy that made Konami's *Dance Dance Revolution* such a phenomenon, it converted thousands of gamers to the rhythm action cause, and made people ask a question they'd never anticipated asking: how much for a pair of second-hand maracas?

Excitebike 64

Format: N64 | Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Left Field | Origin: US | Date: 2000

Reviewed in E86



In retrospect

This update of the classic 2D NES title into the 3D realm was handled wonderfully by California codeshop Left Field. To date it remains one of the best looking and most challenging titles on the N64 – though sadly it appeared too late in the console's lifespan (especially the year-late PAL conversion) to really make a difference. Extended play of *Excitebike 64* – and its manifold sub-games and competition modes – suggests that Edge could have pushed the rating up a notch; it was really only the N64's hardware limitations that prevented a higher score. A more fluidly realised GameCube version would be very welcome indeed.



US developer Left Field has pushed the N64 hardware to breaking point, with detailed scenery and multiple opponents. There's even a bordered high-res mode, but frame rate problems prevent its use

Place *Excitebike 64* alongside *Wave Race 64* and *1080° Snowboarding* and you'll find yourself in possession of an inspired trilogy perfectly suited to the N64's analogue controller.

The game mixes 20 indoor SuperX-style arenas and fantastical outdoor stages split over four seasons and three difficulty levels. Progression is typically Nintendo: clear a season before you're allowed on to the next, harder setting. And it's worth mentioning that *Excitebike 64*'s later levels are ruthless, requiring you to judge your jumps and negotiate tracks to a tee.

Yet this is the elegance of the game – it's not simply a case of blasting, turbo screaming, over every jump unless you enjoy crossing the finish line last. Learn the circuits and you'll find yourself slowing down for certain run ups, or blazing up others, turning mid air to set up the bike for the next corner, always looking for the smoothest ride around the track.

To this add optional fourplayer action for exhibition races, a one-on-one challenge cup, a custom season, and a friendly track editor. Occasional frustrations aside, this is easily the best-structured and most enjoyable motocross package around.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



Mr. Driller

Format: PlayStation | Publisher: Namco | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 2000

Reviewed in E87

Bouncing into place alongside classic Japanese puzzlers *Puzzle Bobble* and *Puyo Puyo*, Namco's coin-op curio *Mr. Driller* is a perfect illustration of why 2D gaming shouldn't be allowed to die.

Of the eight action buttons on a PlayStation joypad, this game uses one: steering a path down through stages of different size coloured blocks, you drill to clear a path. As blocks are removed from the pile, those above drop down (squashing you if you're underneath). If they pass another chunk of the same colour, they form a combined lump. When these lumps exceed four pieces or more, they disappear; the larger the block, the higher the points awarded.

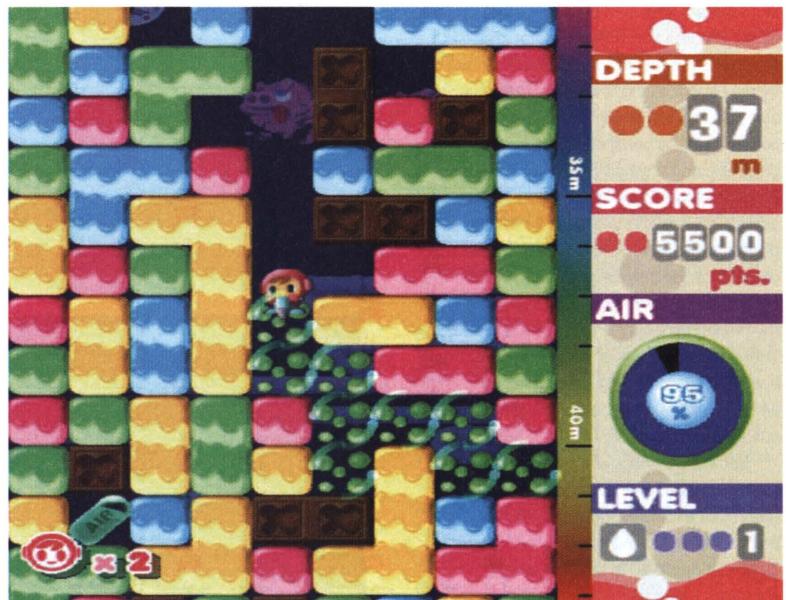
The compelling elements of *Mr. Driller* are the simple attractions of classic arcade gaming: speed, points, survival and dexterity. Strangely, the addition of a two-player race mode hasn't been made. It's a real shame, as it deprives *Mr. Driller* of the competitive play offered by Taito's seminal *Puzzle Bobble*.

But Namco has wrought a minor gameplay miracle with *Mr. Driller*. There is a near-mindless compulsion, placing the player in a tunnel-like gaming 'zone'. Drill, dodge, drill, drill, dodge...



In retrospect

Like all great puzzle games, *Mr. Driller* has lost none of its charm since its release. It still remains one of the most addictive games in the arcade, on PSOne, Dreamcast and GBA. Perhaps the game's most enduring quality is that you can play it for ten minutes – when the mood takes you – but you'll probably end up spending the next two hours trying to complete the 5,000ft expert mode. A piece of undiluted gaming pleasure.



Mr. Driller provides a glorious slice of simplistic arcade gameplay. The air meter on the right provides a cue as to the health of your character; air bubbles around the screen provide life-saving top-ups

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

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Deus Ex

Format: PC Publisher: Eidos Developer: Ion Storm Origin: US Date: 2000

Reviewed in E88



Shortly after arriving in Hong Kong, Denton (top) encounters two gangs of warring triads. Here, they settle their differences in an unused subway station



In retrospect

Dammed by fools for its average looks, *Deus Ex* rewarded a mindset that rates intelligence above beauty by providing a consuming FPS with, for once, a smart storyline which provided a pervading impression of non-linearity. Perhaps overlong but always entertaining, it was the culmination of a trend that saw increasingly sedentary FPS releases, and signalled the beginning of the dumb-fun backlash, crystallised by CroTeam's *Serious Sam* (above).

Explosions and smoke effects are dramatic, if not especially realistic. Structures are varied within the same geographical area, taking Denton from engineering plants to trying his luck in a local nightspot

After the unholy mess of Romero's *Daikatana*, *Deus Ex* – a project headed by Warren Spector – perhaps represented an immediate opportunity for developer Ion Storm to make up some lost ground. Early reports touted it as a 'The Matrix'-inspired adventure, or a near-future RPG, or a *Half-Life*-beating firstperson shooter. A look at the finished product shows the reason for the confusion: *Deus Ex* is all it promised to be and more, defying all attempts at pigeonholing.

The player takes on the role of JC Denton, an agent for a post-UN peacekeeping force called UNATCO, dedicated to fighting a war against terrorism in a future world ravaged by poverty and disease. The disease in question is the 'Gray Death', and the only remedy is the drug Ambrosia, which is being hoarded for those in positions of power and influence. The terrorists have targeted Ambrosia, and are demanding its distribution directly to the people. Ethically, they have a point.

Beginning just outside New York, the game is extravagant in its locations, taking in Hong Kong, Paris, Area 51 and beyond. The Unreal engine, improved with enhanced lighting and a more realistic physics model, renders each with occasional beauty, albeit mainly due to the sophisticated level design. These are 3D mazes carved from cities, each holding secrets, a mass of characters, and multiple problems to overcome.

Games often claim multiple completion methods, but rarely achieve their goal with this much variation and style. Stealth, sniping, destruction, intelligence, planning, rampages – all have their place within the multi-layered mission structure. Is it a *Metal Gear Solid* clone, a *Doom*-style killfest? As the game morphs seamlessly between genres, adapting your tactics can be an advantage, but is rarely an absolute necessity. With RPG elements, ultimately, you build up the character of Denton – you're responsible for his strengths and weaknesses, which is hugely satisfying.

Above all, *Deus Ex* never tells you what to do. The only weaknesses concern the gradual degeneration of the plot into third-rate sci-fi nonsense and some appalling voice acting, which detract from the experience, as do the large saving and loading times between areas. These are irritations the game deserves to be without, but they aren't enough to spoil the enjoyment. Put simply, *Deus Ex* is the anti-*Daikatana* – a game that not only lives up to its hype, but often exceeds it.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Jet Set Radio

Format: Dreamcast Publisher: Sega Developer: In-house Origin: Japan Date: 2000

Reviewed in E88

Fears that *Jet Set Radio* places style over content should be eliminated immediately. The vivid cartoon graphics and much-lauded cel shading could certainly have provided convenient excuses for Sega's development team to produce a poor man's *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, but *Jet Set Radio* updates the skate grind genre with a depth and vibrancy that can be breathtaking.

The premise is simple: rollerblade around areas of the local city tagging the territory to establish your gang's authority. The tag areas are indicated by large red arrows; green arrows provide locations for bonus points. Cleverly, individuals from opposing gangs can be seen spraying their logos around the environment as you play – crashing into them, stealing their paint canisters and daubing over their work is just one of the many subtle joys provided by the game. The aim is to spray over all rival tags and secure the area before time runs out.

If this was all *JSR* offered, then complaints about Sega shallowness would be justified. However, the design of the levels, married with the strategies that must be employed, serve to enliven and deepen the gameplay experience. Indeed, the deeper you go into the game the more involving it becomes. After unlocking all the areas and literally painting the whole town red, the local crime syndicate threatens to spoil your fun. Henchmen complete with sunglasses, moustaches, perms and laser-sighted weapons must be defeated to unlock the next city. Add generating your own tags with an editing facility, and there is enough here to consume many hours of your leisure time.

Skating around the *Jet Set Radio* world is a hoot in itself – a wide range of grinds, flips and tricks can be performed with relative ease. Though the aerial gymnastics are more limited than those of the *Tony Hawk's* titles, they tend to be more intuitive – combos, wall grinds and rail grinds can be performed with the push of one button and a movement on the analogue stick. Landing directly on a distant rail after leaping and somersaulting several times is an exhilarating experience.

Sega has produced one of the most assured and visually arresting games in recent years; that the gameplay matches the groundbreaking stylistics shows an almost arrogant confidence. Those still unconvinced by Dreamcast's credentials should be ashamed.



Despite *Jet Set Radio*'s copious use of cel-shading, its cityscapes are as solid and believable as any yet seen

In retrospect

If anything, the graphical flair which underpinned the rollerbladin' mayhem has taken on an even greater significance with time. Now the term 'cel-shading' has become part of videogame lexicon and the technique has been mimicked in titles as diverse as *Cel Damage* and *DNA*. It still remains a stunningly playable game in its own right, however, and is soon to be updated with various bells and whistles for *Jet Set Radio Future* on Microsoft's Xbox.

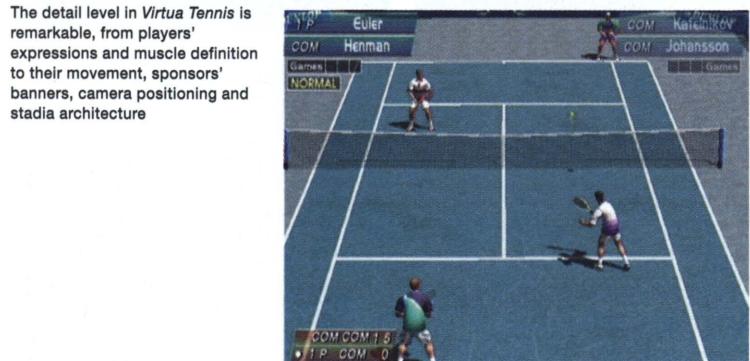
Virtua Tennis

Format: Dreamcast | Publisher: Sega | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 2000

Reviewed in E88



The detail level in *Virtua Tennis* is remarkable, from players' expressions and muscle definition to their movement, sponsors' banners, camera positioning and stadia architecture



Fourplayer games are managed by the provision of CPU-controlled opponents or partners. Their actions are utterly realistic and quite uncanny to watch



In retrospect

Sega's sublime simulation was the sole possessor of the 'best tennis game' crown for all of one issue before *Mario Tennis* upset the balance of power in issue 89. Despite the comedic, cartoon graphics and the fact that you could only play as Mario, Bowser and co., the game's scintillating gameplay and intuitive control system made it every bit as good as Sega's photorealistic take on the sport. *Virtua Tennis'* recent sequel added female players to the roster, but failed to take the gameplay to any higher level. With the demise of Dreamcast, it's surely only a matter of time before *Virtua Tennis* surfaces on one – if not all – of the next-gen consoles. A wider audience surely beckons...

Virtua Tennis originally emerged as an arcade game. Its marriage of simple two-button control and sumptuous aesthetics proved too tempting for most, even luring non-gamers and the most casual of tennis followers into their nearest arcade. Unsurprisingly, then, the home version offers the same five-stage, two-game international tournament. Visually identical to its coin-op parent, including flawless presentation, impressive attention to detail, wonderfully effective replays and exquisite animation, DC *Virtua Tennis* also retains the exceptional playability that has led it to enjoy great popularity in the arcades.

There's more to *Virtua Tennis* than a straightforward arcade port, of course. Most significantly, the game introduces a doubles mode, so it's now possible for you and a friend to either partner up and take on the CPU opposition or stand on opposite sides of the net alongside your artificially intelligent team-mate. The way these react to the action is remarkable, swapping sides, adapting their game to yours if necessary, and generally behaving like a real-life tennis partner. The resulting rallies offer some supremely satisfying gameplay.

Four players can take part, and you may as well make use of the game's exhibition mode at this stage. Given *Virtua Tennis'* looks, persuading acquaintances to pick up a joypad shouldn't pose much of a problem. The World Circuit option is *Virtua Tennis'* main mode for those with few joypads. It's a substantial, well-structured one-player package, giving you the chance to take one of the eight players initially available up the world rankings by travelling the globe, entering and winning competitions.

Although the control system may appear initially limiting (a button for forehand/backhand and smash and volley, another for lobs), combining it with directional controls determines the nature of your shots – suddenly, your range of returns opens up in an impressively comprehensive manner. The game is playable using the D-pad, but the analogue stick offers superior control in terms of shot placement and length, even if things may feel a little odd for anyone graduating from the digital tennis games of yesteryear. Were it not for the irritation caused by the almost unbeatable players in later stages and the inability to play more than a single set per match, *Virtua Tennis* would have been a near-perfect sports game.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Alien Resurrection

Format: PlayStation | Publisher: Fox Interactive | Developer: Argonaut | Origin: UK | Date: 2000

Reviewed in E89

Resurrection's film-based plot means you begin as Ripley, with both humans and aliens trying to take you down. The humans are tough, the aliens tougher. If they get to you – they're slower than their film or PC counterparts, but they're still fast – you're dead. They run up walls, across ceilings, and scuttle towards you with startling pace.

Initially, it all seems a bit unfair, especially with a joypad. No matter how well-designed the interface, the DualShock's two analogue sticks can never substitute for the instinctive FPS control of a mouse. Despite the numerous control configurations offered here, the inaccuracy of the joypad irritates, especially when you find yourself in a sudden, surprise confrontation, where *Resurrection* excels. Thankfully, mouse support is included and changes the game from frustrating to, literally, scarily good.

The PlayStation benefits from the leaden claustrophobia that indelibly marks the films, the terrifying gloom hiding the inevitable jagged polygons and crude bitmaps. When they do come to light, they're forgivable. When a rare bright light illuminates a smear of bitmapped blood and your imagination tells you something's been dragged screaming towards an uneven hole in the wall, it's not the obvious polygons that scare.

What sets *Resurrection* apart from anything that's gone before it is the fear it engenders. Even during a casual half-hour game in the daytime it has the capacity to scare – play it in the dark and it's absolutely terrifying. In fact, play it with the sound turned down and the lights on and you're missing the point. Flickering shadows, and no health, no bullets, no torchlight, no save points. And worst of all, the distant screaming and scratching on metal, the tip-tapping that gets closer, and the lack of enemies anywhere. Until... screech, panic and scream.

This is *Doom*, not *Deus Ex*; forget about stealth and sneaking up on your alien foes – their presence is triggered by your actions and it's all rigged to happen when you're at your most vulnerable. Not just at the lows in your character's health, but at the peaks of your emotional fragility. It exhibits little originality, but is near-perfect in its scripting, execution and timing – a little ironic given its delayed release. Whether it's a testament to what can still be achieved with PlayStation or its final hurrah, *Alien Resurrection* merits praise and celebration.



Edge rating: Eight out of ten



In retrospect

When the game finally emerged from development hell the film was long gone. But all to Argonaut's credit for holding off and producing (possibly) the most tense and jump-inducing videogame ever. The dark interiors and genuinely frightening aliens made the heart-beat pulse of the DualShock controller all the more unnerving. And the game was quiet, so quiet. Only the occasional noise of whirring machinery distracted you from the bleeps appearing on your scanner. And then the terror began. Only *Silent Hill 2* comes close to matching the fear induced by this title.

Crawling through vents may not be an overly original aspect of resurrection, but given that the films are so grounded in fear and claustrophobia, they're particularly relevant

The presence of face-huggers adds more panic to *Resurrection*'s already fearful mix. They're difficult to hit, and if they get you, you'll wake from unconsciousness with a baby alien waiting to hatch...

F355 Challenge

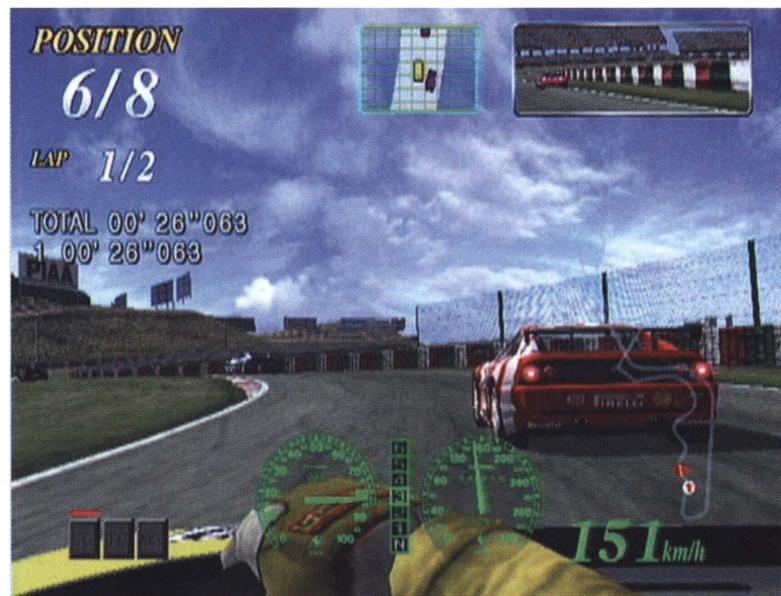
Format: Dreamcast | Publisher: Sega | Developer: In-house | Origin: Japan | Date: 2000

Reviewed in E89



In retrospect

Edge's rating caused something of a storm when the game was originally reviewed, but the wild understeer still grates. For the majority the challenge is just pitched too high, with rival vehicles usually coming off better after scrapes. Visually it's splendidly but losing five places after braking a split second too late on the final corner just becomes frustrating.



Possibly the best looking racer to date, *F355* offers inspired renditions of Monza, Sugo, Suzuka (short/international layouts), Long Beach, Atlanta, Laguna Seca, Nürburgring, Kuala Lumpur and Fiorano

Most people will initially find *F355 Challenge* dull and insanely difficult. But after 30 minutes it becomes clear that it is no narcolepsy cure, nor is it impossible to play. It's true, though, that getting to grips with 380bhp of pseudo-authentically simulated Italian engineering on 11 (six from the arcade and five a DC-only bonus) of the world's most technical circuits takes a little longer than it does in most racing games.

What sets *F355* apart is that it is unquestionably one of the most comprehensively hardcore racing games to date. There's no eagerness on its part to reward your initial feeble efforts, and it makes no concessions for your inexperience. With eight competitors matching each other in terms of performance, this is real racers' territory: if you want to win in *F355*, you're going to have to work at it, bringing all your videogame experience into play. As such, *F355* draws you in like few other games.

It's not perfect by any means: it could be better balanced, there aren't enough tracks, the cars don't take damage and never seem to have enough grip. But this is a splendid effort and easily the best Dreamcast driving game to date.

Edge rating:

Seven out of ten

Severance: Blade Of Darkness

Format: PC | Publisher: Codemasters | Developer: Rebel Act Studios | Origin: Spain | Date: 2001

Reviewed in E95

The twin selling points of *Severance* are some impressive lighting effects and a super-abundance of blood and gore. Wow. The novelty value of gushing blood and hacked-off limbs is negligible while pretty shadows are impressive for about five minutes before the realisation sets in that this plays like an object lesson in how not to design a videogame.

From the hackneyed and stale environments to the ludicrously cumbersome control system, it is staggering to think that this is the culmination of nearly five years of development. It is mystifying that Codemasters has chosen to publish it.

At its heart is a beat 'em up combo dynamic, bolstered by a simplified RPG-style level advancement. And although this is an interesting concept, it is undone by poor collision detection. Uninspired level design contributes to uneven pacing, with spiked pits and collapsing bridges making sure that the load screen is as much a part of this game as deficient AI and the need to smash crates.

Some PC owners may find solace in *Severance* as a technical demo; anybody expecting a rewarding game would do well to steer clear.



In retrospect

Edge's review of *Severance* proved contentious. Devoted PC gamers, thrilled by the game's lighting effects and abundance of gore flooded the magazine's forums and letters pages, condemning what they perceived as a deliberate attempt to create controversy. Nevertheless, Edge stands by its criticisms of a title that had little to offer in gameplay terms, despite a lengthy gestation period. With an Xbox version in the offing, there's always the chance that the game's Spanish developer will get its act together, though Edge isn't exactly holding its breath.



This single screenshot is the embodiment of *Severance*, in that it features a pair of combatants, light-sourced and shaded polygons, and loads of blood. Sadly, what you see is what you get

Edge rating:

Two out of ten

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn

Format: PC Publisher: Interplay Developer: Bioware Origin: Canada Date: 2000

Reviewed in E91

The follow-up to the critically lauded and commercially successful *Baldur's Gate* continues where the last instalment left off. Set in the Forgotten Realms AD&D world, literally hundreds of hours of gameplay are devoted to the development of a narrative which encompasses betrayal, gods of murder, shadowy political organisations, errant wizards and, of course, dragons.

The intuitive interface and beautifully rendered backdrops all make a more polished appearance in *Shadows Of Amn*, and while the game does suffer from the usual set of bugbears that have characterised the lot of videogame roleplayers down the years – internal inconsistencies such as being able to rifle through drawers and wardrobes without incurring a negative response from their owners – it is difficult to find more fault with it than that.

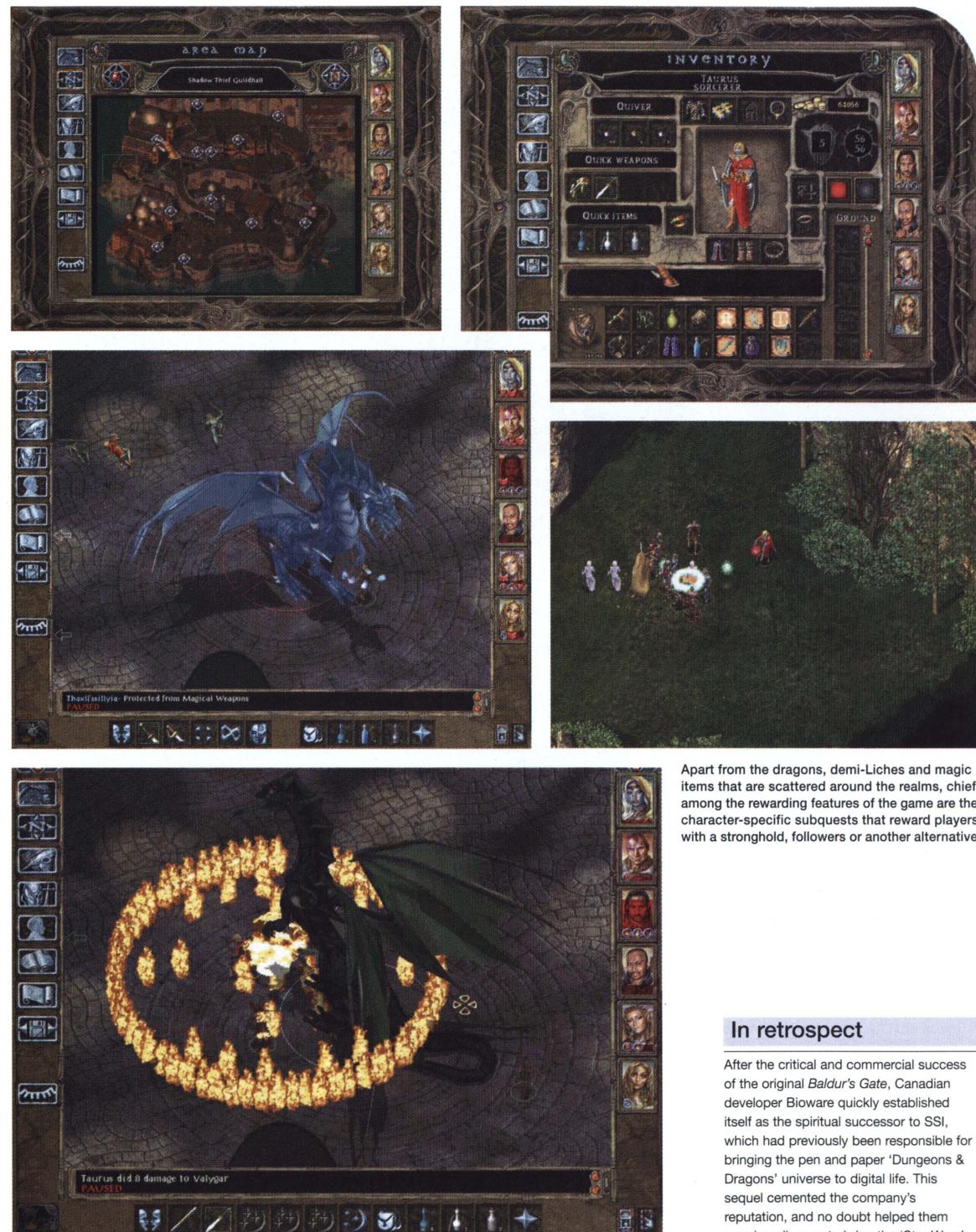
Anyone who enjoyed devoting a significant portion of their life to immersing themselves in the rich tapestry of the original *Baldur's Gate* will find that *Shadows Of Amn* has succeeded in maintaining the accessible interface of its precursor, while incorporating an even greater degree of complexity below the surface. After a relatively simple introduction, it becomes clear that this really is a gaming cornucopia, with an overarching epic story at the centre of the game surrounded and extended by a wealth of other quests that befall your lead character. The interaction between NPCs in the party with each other and their relationship with the outside world is just one of the ways in which such quests contribute to a sense of involvement in a bigger picture.

Given the current vogue for titles to ship with a multiplayer mode that allows players to set quests for their peers, including Bioware's own forthcoming *Neverwinter Nights*, it may be considered a deficiency that *Shadows Of Amn* doesn't include such a feature. After all, the flexible response of a human moderator allows a far greater sophistication when it comes to character development and narrative structure than is currently possible with computers or consoles. Nevertheless, the game comes closer than ever before to providing players with intuitive access to an expansive environment that responds realistically to their actions, ensuring a sense of fulfilment that more than justifies the massive investment in time needed to complete the game.



Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



As with the first chapter in the *Baldur's Gate* saga, the combat style is pitched somewhere between the simplicity of *Diablo* and the sophistication of a typical RTS. The ability to pause the action is essential

Apart from the dragons, demi-Liches and magic items that are scattered around the realms, chief among the rewarding features of the game are the character-specific subquests that reward players with a stronghold, followers or another alternative

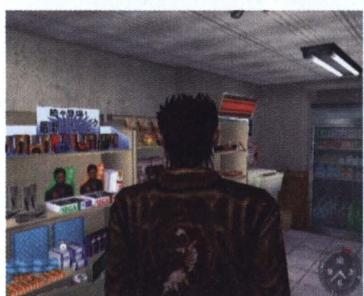
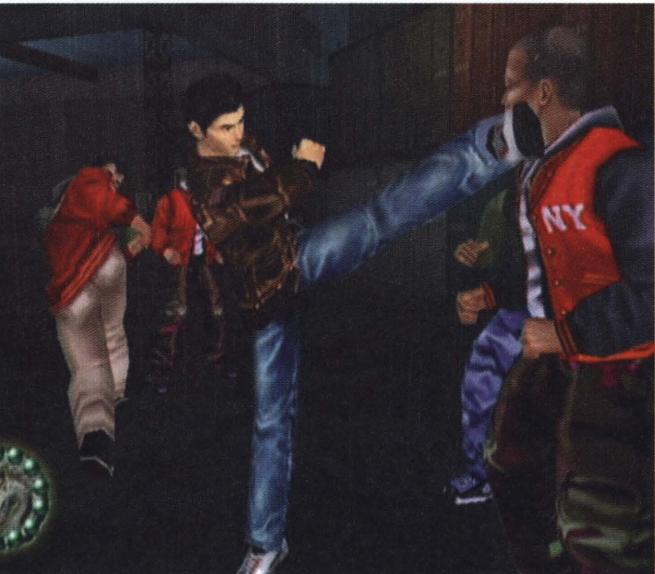
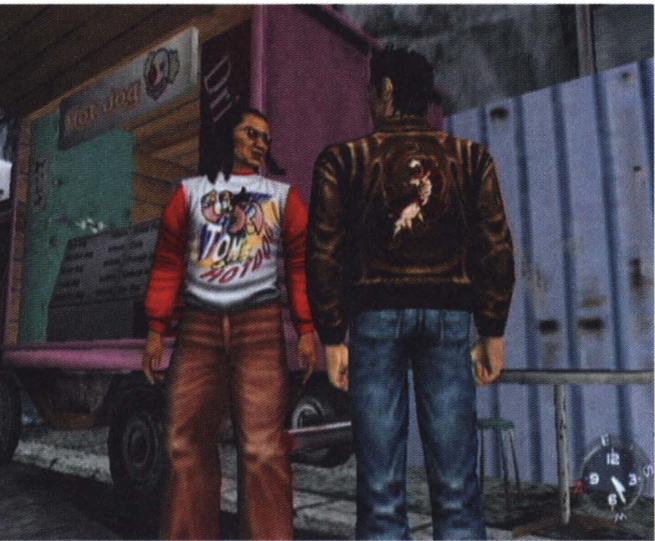
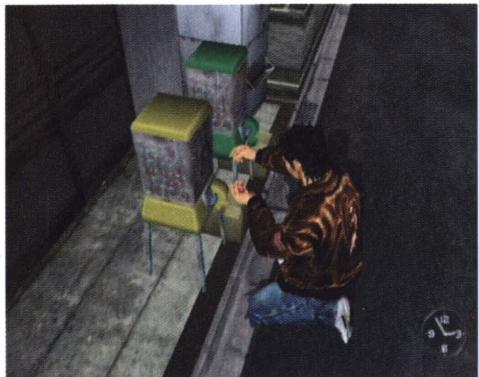
In retrospect

After the critical and commercial success of the original *Baldur's Gate*, Canadian developer Bioware quickly established itself as the spiritual successor to SSI, which had previously been responsible for bringing the pen and paper 'Dungeons & Dragons' universe to digital life. This sequel cemented the company's reputation, and no doubt helped them acquire a licence to bring the 'Star Wars' universe to life in what is to be hoped will be a similarly epic and engrossing RPG.

Shenmue

Format: Dreamcast | Developer: Sega | Publisher: AM2 | Origin: Japan | Date: 2000

Reviewed in E92



In retrospect

Let's face it, you either find Ryo's quest to find the murderer of his father tremendously captivating, or it's like watching pixels dry. **Edge** thought the former, revelling in the sights and sounds of a convincingly constructed world. With such an ambitious game there were bound to be problems. Pop-up and risible voice acting were pointed out in the original review, the unwieldy control mechanism wasn't. The mini-games remain a delightful diversion and have been expanded in *Shenmue 2* to include soot-cleaning and leaf-catching.

Shenmue presents a vivid, detailed gameworld for your exploration. You have to earn your keep by playing a variety of QuickTime sub-games, such as crate-stacking or forklift truck racing, and the cash can be used to buy transport to other areas, or frittered away on games and novelty items

There is a moment in *Shenmue* when your absorption in the game suddenly becomes apparent. For **Edge** it was in coming across a family snap of the Hazuki family while idly rummaging around some of the drawers in the house. The moment was not dramatised with music, nor was it accompanied by a lengthy cut-scene, yet the image of the happy group – which includes the hero's murdered father – is poignant nonetheless. The photo has absolutely no functional value in the game, but this is the point. It serves as one of the many details that make the *Shenmue* universe feel complete.

Many may want to deride some of the voice acting in the game, the pop-up, or the often rusty RPG mechanics, but *Shenmue*'s spell will seduce all but the most cynical gamer. There are layers of depth which make *Shenmue* a more involving game than anything else you are likely to play this year. Enter the basement of the Hazuki home, for instance, and you will blindly fumble around without light. But overcoming this difficulty is not just a case of locating the torch à la *Resident Evil* – that is only one of the options. The spent bulb can be replaced with one from the local store, or if you are less inclined to spend the money that Ryo's mother gives you every morning, you can light some candles.

It is not total freedom, because that would imply a more direct control over action and event than *Shenmue* offers, but it is the closest a game universe has come in giving the impression of independence outside of your actions. While the trick is flawed, the execution should be applauded nevertheless.

It is the perpetual clock that provides the framework upon which the game operates, and it is here where *Shenmue* both excels and grates. Shops open and close as in the real world, buses run to timetables, appointments are arranged. Yet given that much of the game consists of being at certain locations at given times, there is not enough distraction to keep you engaged while waiting. The story, too, is very much on rails. There are no puzzles to speak of; it is more a case of finding directions to the next clue.

Shenmue is much more than an interactive movie, but certainly does not deliver the freedom expected. It's involving, and ultimately rewarding, but only represents a step towards what may be possible in the future, rather than the videogame milestone **Edge** hoped for.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



TimeSplitters

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Eidos Developer: Free Radical Design Origin: UK Date: 2000

Reviewed in E91

TimeSplitters' Story mode offers oneplayer (or two co-operative), fun on an uncommonly elementary level. The nine stages scattered between 1935 to 2035 require you to retrieve a specified artefact and bring it back to the designated spot. There are no cut-scenes, no layers of narrative, no switches, no puzzles, no gadgets. Nothing but enemies, weapons, energy packs, the odd shield and the artefact, of course. There is no blood of any kind, either, which is initially very odd.

There isn't much furniture, either. The size and complexity of the various levels increases the further you get, but the interiors are decidedly empty, with precious little background interaction. This isn't an oversight – it helps keeps the frame rate up. Quit out of the Story mode, indulge in a furious deathmatch and, suddenly, the nakedness of the levels is put into context – the action is Quake-like fast.

It isn't perfect, of course. Despite the game's pace, the level of detail isn't quite as high as it should be. But then TimeSplitters isn't a lot of things. It isn't subtle, it isn't pretentious, it isn't visually revolutionary. But give it time. You'll find it exhilarating, unconventional, fluid, and wonderfully compelling.



Edge rating: Eight out of ten



In retrospect

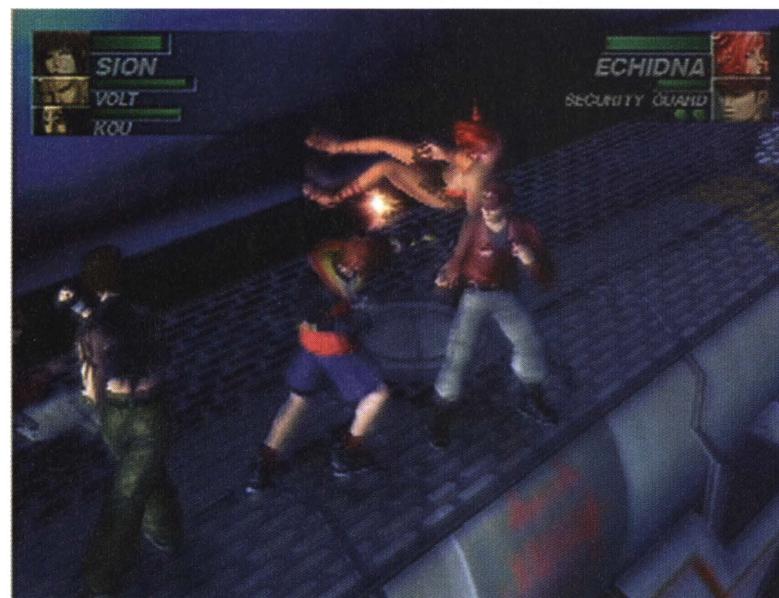
Arguably, this is still the best multiplayer game on PlayStation2. The action is still amazingly frantic and there's never a hint of slowdown. The single player game is decidedly hollow, but for a reason: the game needed to be ready for the PS2 launch and Free Radical always geared it towards those who would be willing to invest in a multi-tap. Others compared it (quite unfairly) to GoldenEye, but it's a different game altogether.

TimeSplitters can be seen as the distillation of the firstperson shooter. Graphical deficiencies serve to keep the game fast and frantic, while the lack of punctuating FMV is to be roundly commended

The Bouncer

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Squaresoft Developer: Dream Factory Origin: Japan Date: 2001

Reviewed in E94



In retrospect

The disappointment couldn't have been more crushing when this 'free roaming' beat 'em up finally emerged from Squaresoft. It ended up as a series of glossy cut-scenes interspersed with poorly implemented punch/kick action. The general gaming press, however, desperate to evangelise Sony's new machine, still gave the game excessive scores. It sold decent numbers and made a lot of people miserable.

The Bouncer is the videogame equivalent of shopping channel favourite 'Diamondique'. It was hoped that Square would produce a seminal next-generation beat 'em up adding another jewel to the company's crown. Instead it turns out to be paste.

Clearly most of the effort expended on The Bouncer went into the segments surrounding the core action, as the game's fighting aspects are weak in the extreme. The moves are relatively comprehensive, and a well-implemented power-up system comes in the form of purchasable extra attacks. Yet, due to the sluggish sensitivity and lack of sophistication, the system fails to lift the game to even average status.

Those who witnessed early footage of characters jumping on to trains and leaping between buildings will be saddened to learn that none of this dynamism is incorporated into the game proper. The Bouncer's only saving grace is its secret characters, special moves, and arenas for the Versus and Survival modes. But even these can't banish the disappointment. Yes, The Bouncer offers a brief glimpse of what lies ahead for PS2, but most will not be able to see beyond its failure to bring Final Fight to the 128bit era.



The analogue buttons can be used to deliver hard or soft attacks. In practice, however, such subtle nuances add little to the combat. Most enemies are easily defeated with simple button-jabbing

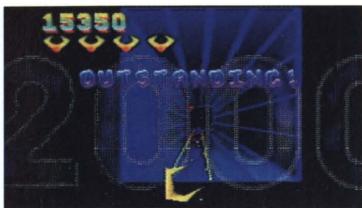
Edge rating:

Three out of ten

Tempest 3000

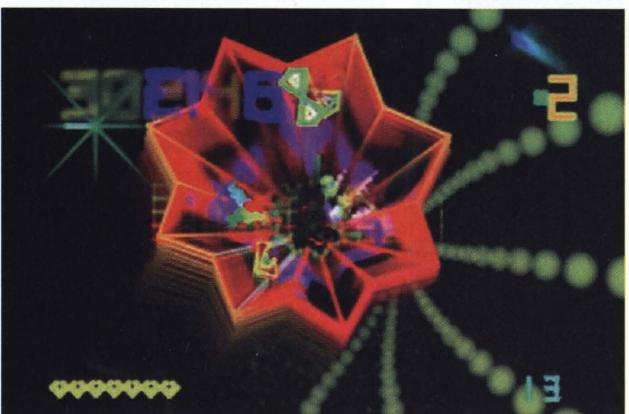
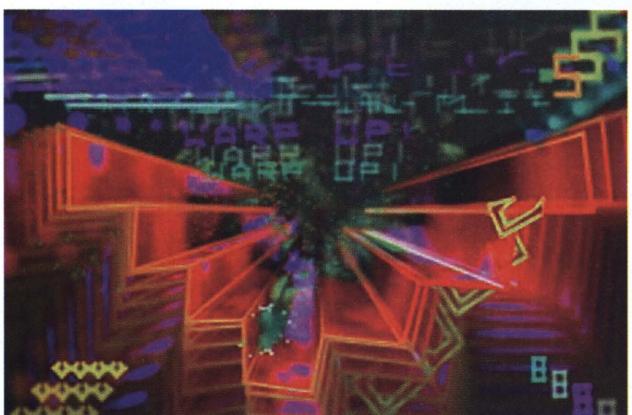
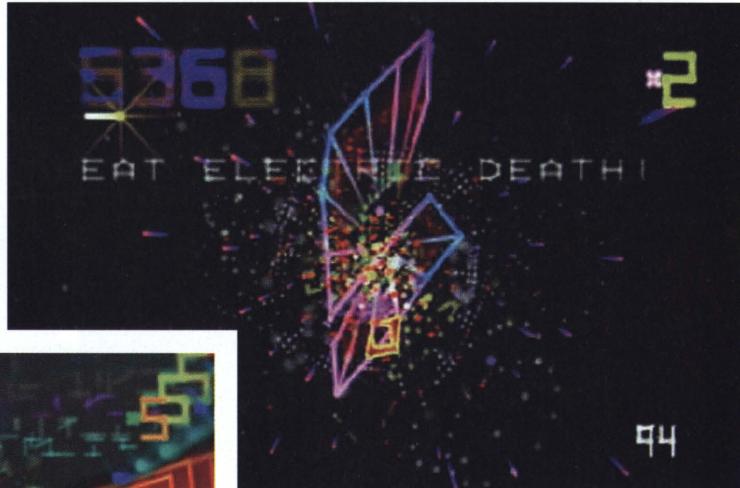
Format: Nuon | Publisher: Hasbro Interactive | Developer: Jeff Minter | Origin: UK | Date: 2001

Reviewed in E95

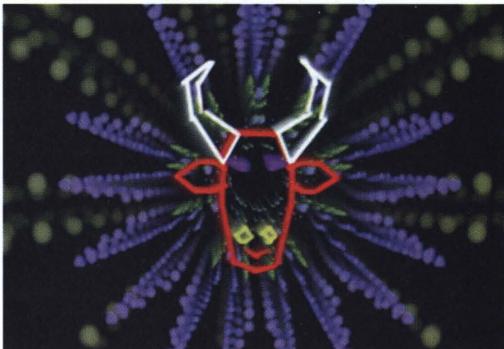
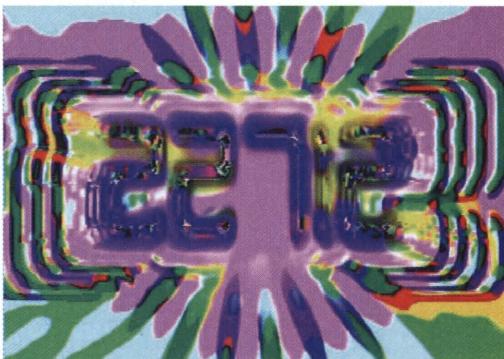


In retrospect

One of the purest videogames around, Jeff Minter's second reworking of Dave Theurer's 1981 creation should undoubtedly prove itself a timeless singleplayer experience. Visually and aurally semi-improved from its previous Jaguar and PlayStation appearances, T3K remains one of the most addictive and attractively hypnotic videogames to date. Sadly, its abstract nature immediately guaranteed it massmarket failure while a fringe format release alienated all but the most dedicated of gamers (Nuon doesn't appear to have made it to the UK, after all, leaving no option but to import a Nuon DVD player from the US).



The shots here do a pretty good job of portraying the vivid effervescence of Minter's latest work. The word 'psychedelic' could have been coined by Minter himself.



Assuming such things were possible, to spend some time inside Jeff Minter's mind would certainly be a unique experience. Other developers who coded around their own intriguing ideas during videogaming's childhood are still working in the industry today, of course, but few – if any – can claim to have stuck with their personal ideology with the kind of conviction as the father of the likes of *Llamatron* has over the years.

T3K exists because Jeff Minter simply wanted to play this exact game – he has designed it according to a personal doctrine. You can't begin to imagine that at any time there was any concern regarding how the average gamer might interpret the results – and the game is undoubtedly better for it.

In truth, there's nothing remarkably revolutionary about this third *Tempest* update. The play mechanics of the game remain the same – as the Claw, your task is to blast anything and everything adventurous enough to make its way up the web into an early spacial grave. You'll learn to casually remove Flippers, discourage Spikers from clogging up the web, and hate Pulsars with a passion. In common with this trio, the other 16 varieties of opponent also display their individual behavioural and attack patterns, knowledge of which becomes crucial if you plan to make it on to the high-score table.

Naturally, the further you get, the more complicated things become. While initial webs are remarkably simplistic, on later levels your opponents cause them to spin and/or alter their structural integrity, resulting in some particularly anxious gaming moments. Furiously frenetic action has always been *Tempest*'s essence.

Yes, it is repetitive. But only in the same way that *Tetris* is. *Tempest 3000* matches Alexei Pajitnov's masterpiece for playability and may beat it in terms of player involvement. It's beautifully balanced, too, constantly forcing you to take risks if you seek the points – yes, you can use the superzapper (smart bomb) and clear the screen, but have you noticed that every time you do, you lose your multiplier bonus?

Many of today's gamers will simply disregard Minter's latest slice of psychedelic genius. And in an industry currently obsessed with increasingly complex titles, be they FPSs, RTSs or MMORPGs, it's infuriating to find it difficult to convey just how appealing the purity of this title becomes.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

Phantasy Star Online

Format: Dreamcast Publisher: Sega Developer: Sonic Team Origin: Japan Date: 2001

Reviewed in E95

It looks heavenly from the images, but when people have such high expectations from a game, it's easy to believe something's there when it's not. Consume the rumours across the Internet and you'll find it's a socially acceptable *EverQuest*, or it's *Diablo II* in full 3D, or it's what happens when J-pop meets 'Dungeons & Dragons'. It deserves better than to be described as a corruption or advancement of an existing title: this is something new, and it feels like an epiphany.

Connect to *Phantasy Star Online* and it's like closing your eyes and appearing in someone else's dream. Open them again, and you're still there, and so are the others. They appear slowly at first, like your vision's taking time to adjust to Naka-san's sugar-coated future – then there's one, five, ten of them, fizzing into view as the Dreamcast loads their hazily sweet imagery. They're playing on a different continent, or just up the road, but now they're here, and they're talking to you via one of PSO's three dialogue systems. "Hello >" says a Japanese guy. "Do you want to go on an adventure?"

Still, behind all the talk lies a structure less revolutionary: kill all the monsters on a level, and move to the next. The combat is more *Gauntlet* than *Zelda*. In fact, it cheapens the game to such an extent that the action is quickly boring in oneplayer mode.

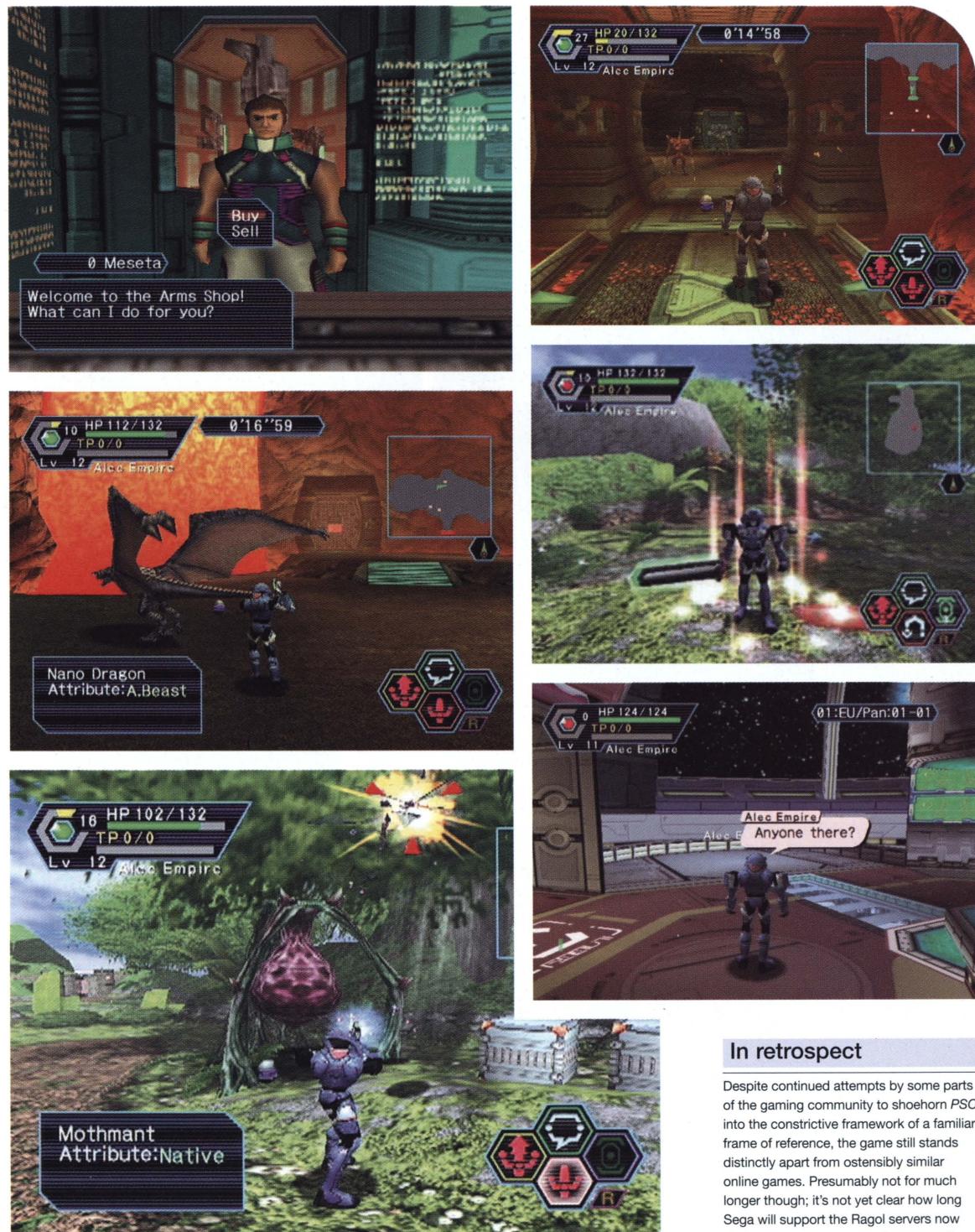
Connect, though, and suddenly the combat dynamic falls into place. Those with guns provide cover for those using bladed weapons, the casters providing healing and attacking reinforcement for both. Different team combinations bring different gameplans, experienced players help the weak, and items are divided fairly amongst the fighters. PSO is essentially a cooperative game and it's hard to find a friendlier online community. Everyone watches each other's backs. Everyone smiles when the dragon gets slain. "Congratulations! >," says the Japanese guy. Thanks. You too.

It's rare that a game both excels and innovates while remaining effortlessly simple. Some will curse that simplicity, declaring the game as too straightforward or the storyline overly linear. They're missing the point. Atmospherically, PSO is without rival, and that's what makes it unmissable. Those who prayed for safe passage for Naka-san's vision can rest easy, because this is a bewitching world fired with stunning creativity. More simply, it's a dream.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



Using PSO's close-combat weapons means you inflict more damage on opponents, but leave yourself open to attack. Beginners may wish to buy a pistol and take shots at enemies from a distance

In retrospect

Despite continued attempts by some parts of the gaming community to shoehorn PSO into the constrictive framework of a familiar frame of reference, the game still stands distinctly apart from ostensibly similar online games. Presumably not for much longer though; it's not yet clear how long Sega will support the Ragol servers now that Dreamcast production has ceased. Here's hoping multiplatform incarnations keep the multiplayer experience intact.

Speedball 2100

Format: PlayStation | Publisher: Empire Interactive | Developer: Bitmap Brothers | Origin: UK | Date: 2000

Reviewed in E90



Though Speedball 2100's arenas have varying designs carved into their metal, the layout remains the same as in the 1990 release, as do the angles from which targets can be struck and points scored

Players enter the arena to sweeping spotlights, but leave (when injured) at the hands of the same medical robots which carried them off ten years ago

Ten years ago, in a software world that was already beginning to become formulaic, the Bitmap Brothers stood out. Each of the developer's games oozed a style, that made them instantly recognisable. 1990's *Speedball 2* represented the company's peak, creating a stylised, ultra-violent future sport that was to captivate the 16bit audience. *Speedball 2100* arrives on the PlayStation a decade later, a generation's expectations loaded on its steel-clad shoulders.

Taking control of the worst team in the league, Brutal Deluxe, your task is to claim victory in three competitions – Knockout, League, and Cup – over three difficulty levels. Despite the game's lack of complexity, winning a tournament takes forever, thanks to the sheer number of matches involved. Regardless, the repetitive grind of the oneplayer mode pales next to the cold fury of twoplayer competition. It's here that *Speedball 2100* recaptures some of the original's spirit, as the game dynamic has been all but cloned.

The game is a football/pinball crossbreed: points are scored by scoring goals, hitting targets, or knocking out opponents. Power-ups, cash, and equipment litter the arena and serve as secondary goals for your ten-man team. Post-match, the money collected can be spent on upgrading statistics, or buying someone from the overly simplistic transfer market. In the oneplayer game this serves as an opportunity to take advantage of all the weaknesses of the game's AI, as you can buy one good player and watch him overwhelm all but the strongest opponents. But, just as in *Speedball 2*, being faced with a human opponent means things are more balanced.

Something may have become apparent by now: *Speedball 2100* is a polygon photocopy of the original. The characterised bitmaps that made up *Brutal Deluxe*, *Super Nashwan*, *Fatal Justice* et al have been stretched over angular polyhedral skulls, producing as close to a three-dimensional recreation as the technology is capable of.

But what lifted *Speedball 2* into the realms of genius was its tongue-in-cheek cartoon chic, but that's been diluted so effectively that all the impact is lost. This looks like any other PlayStation game, and plays as you'd expect a ten-year-old classic to play – retrogaming at its finest, but still a ghost of the initial experience. This isn't the resurrection of the Bitmaps' style-and-substance policy gamers were hoping for. It's a wake.

In retrospect

Issue 82's *Speedball* cover said it all: the Bitmaps are back. The problem was that they returned empty-handed, offering *Edge* a lazy update of a fondly remembered classic. *Speedball 2100*, barely evolved from its 16bit inspiration aside from a redundant polygonal sheen, was wrecked by slowdown, and one of *Edge*'s most anticipated games slipped and faded into nothing. It's to be hoped that the upcoming *Speedball Arena* manages to evoke the passion of the original and not the apathy of the update.

Edge rating:

Four out of ten



Black & White

Format: PC Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Lionhead Studios Origin: UK Date: 2001

Reviewed in E96

Hugely ambitious, *Black & White* melds realtime resource management, elements of RPG and action-adventure, beat 'em up, and Tamagotchi-style creature care in a sumptuous 3D environment. Players are deified, disembodied (apart from a single divine hand), and then deposited on the shores of an island Eden at the start of an epic five-chapter fiction that leaves no emotional stone unturned. Against a background of pantheistic power-struggles, godly influence must be extended by converting and expanding villages. Edenites can be won over with acts of kindness, cruelty, or pure showmanship. A highly intelligent trainable creature is provided to assist the inevitably over-worked overlord.

Even with tutorials, helpful info signposts, and the humorous advice of good and evil conscience characters, the first few hours can be somewhat bewildering. Not until the second chapter do the last vestiges of disorientation pass away. By this time the narrative is providing some welcome context, key skills have been learned, and the player is overseeing a fully functioning community and a house-trained creature. A culture of playful experimentation is the natural consequence of unhurried plot pacing and an intensely interactive physical world.

Towering above the rest of *Black & White*'s considerable accomplishments both figuratively and literally are the creatures. The subtlety and scope of the instruction possible with the three training leashes is simply astounding. Teach miracles, management skills, toilet and dietary habits, pass on prejudices and preferences, shaping a personality (a word rarely used in conjunction with an AI entity) that reflects your own.

Eden's human inhabitants are substantially smarter than their brethren in other RTS/settlement sims. They will devise their own work patterns, sleep when night falls, take tea breaks, fall in love, reproduce, and mourn the dead, leaving gods free to focus on strategic decision-making rather than fussing with unassigned or lost workers.

Spartan multiplayer and skirmish options are disappointments (although Lionhead has promised additional maps to bolster these areas), but should not put off players. *Black & White* is a colossal achievement. Original but approachable, diverse but coherent, drop-dead gorgeous but deep, and above all obscenely entertaining.



Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



There are some 16 species of creature included in the game, with a choice of three – tiger, cow or ape – available at the start

In retrospect

It was meant to be the game he'd always wanted to make, and for the first few glorious weeks, his world, and the much-vaunted creature AI, proved astonishing. In the long term, it flagged, perhaps because of elements that – in retrospect, when players looked back on what they'd spent the best part of a month doing – seemed more like a chore than a videogame. The most accomplished of Molyneux's deity simulators, it proved what religious types have known all along: being a god isn't all smiles, heavenly choruses and dutiful worshippers. Sometimes it's hard work.



The interactions between creatures and villagers in *Black & White* are wonderfully varied. Above, a turtle victorious in battle joins in with ecstatic post-martial celebrations

Operation Flashpoint: Cold War

Format: PC Publisher: Codemasters Developer: Bohemia Interactive Studios Origin: UK Date: 2001

Reviewed in E99



Stepping into a helicopter brings a whole new perspective to the action, and gives a good idea of just how expansive *Flashpoint*'s levels are

In retrospect

This was a surprise. Playing to the sensibilities of PC gamers – guns, realism, and an excellent physics model – *Flashpoint* appeared from nowhere to push the soldier sim into terrifying non-linearity. And while Codemasters' questionable policy of releasing the game early in Europe, effectively using the continent for beta-testing before a fully-patched edition shipped in the States a few months later, may have raised some eyebrows, few could argue with the coherent and consuming qualities of *Flashpoint*'s world.



As well as first- and thirdperson perspectives, *Flashpoint* enables the player to look through the accurately modelled weapon sights. Learning the meaning of the etchings aids progress

The Operation Flashpoint of the title is a fight for freedom: a neutral island overrun by an unknown force at the height of the cold war. NATO presume it's the Russians, the Russians deny their involvement. A solid campaign structure takes you through the imaginary '85 conflict, switching the player's role through a host of combat specialists while maintaining the storyline.

Taking place across three imaginary eastern European islands, the game begins as a typical combat sim, featuring thirdperson action strategy with an emphasis on realism. Soon it becomes much more. Missions go beyond the traditional 'go here, kill this' dynamic, thanks in part to the ability to control any of the well-modelled vehicles that roam the expansive landscape. As the game progresses the tactical emphasis is increased, with the player assuming control of a squad. Initially, though, it's the scale that's truly impressive. The levels are based over kilometres rather than tightly bound areas.

The clever *Flashpoint* player makes sure they're using every piece of that terrain to their advantage, or they may find themselves stranded in open ground in plain sight of a Russian platoon. The clever *Flashpoint* player knows that cover is crucial. One shot can kill, or leave the player crippled – leg injuries leave soldiers crawling, arm injuries unable to aim.

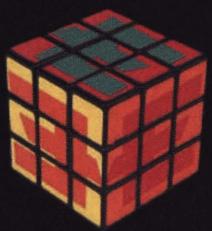
The greatest condemnation has been that it's too difficult to tell friend from foe, but it's meant to be that way. In real life pointing your gun at someone won't tell you where their allegiances lie. The AI is unpredictably good, but while the pathfinding is generally strong, snap weaknesses occur and draw from the atmosphere. While it happens rarely, when your corporal tells you to target a Russian who, on closer inspection, appears to be 15 feet below the normally solid grass, it's a distraction and an irritant. It'll be patched, no doubt, but the game deserves better.

So take some snaps. Watch enemy helicopters cut across the sky, searchlights sweep across expanses of night-cloaked woodland; eject from a spiralling plane and end up lost in a snowstorm behind enemy lines; take in every moment of immersion and one-shot fear. The detail is beautiful, the situations manifold, but they're not the essence of *Flashpoint*. That comes in the decisions – adapting to circumstance and forcing your own, open-ended action and reaction. *Flashpoint* is exceptional.

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten

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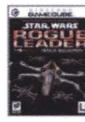
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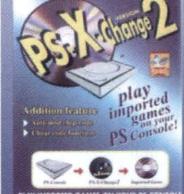
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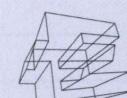
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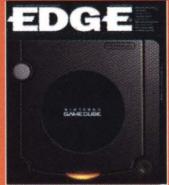
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Key:

- F Feature (Profile, FAQ, Focus, Inside..., The making of..., etc)
- P Prescreen (Alphas, Prescreen)
- Retro Retroview
- T Testscreen (rating in brackets)



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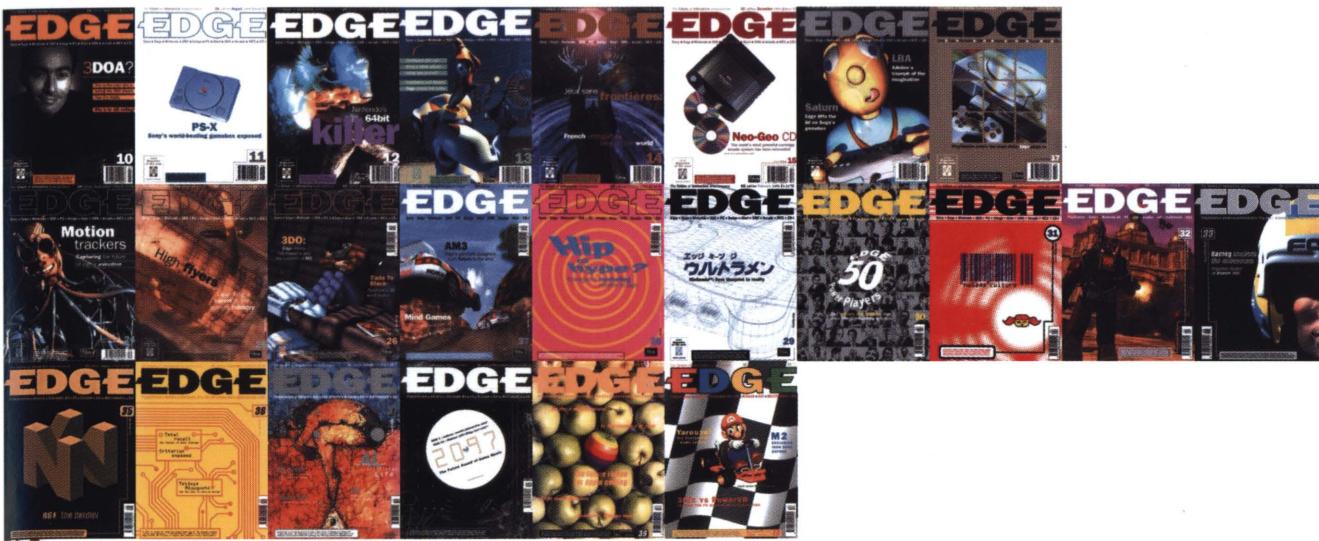
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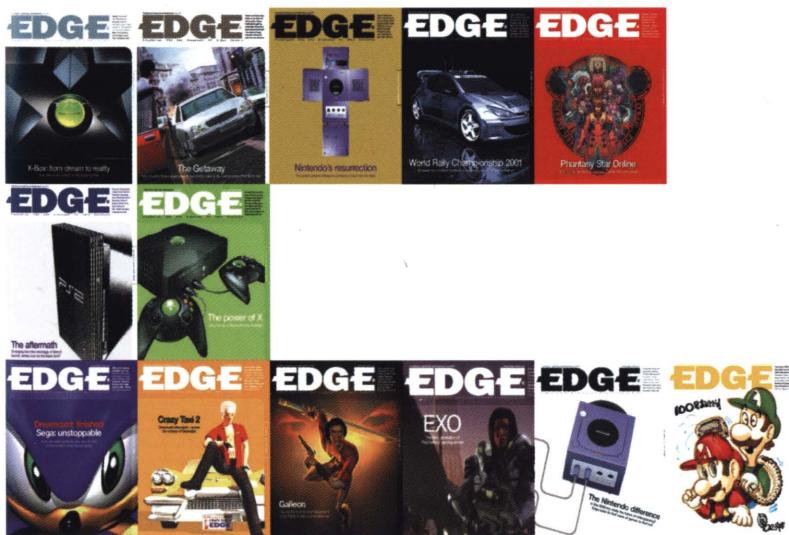
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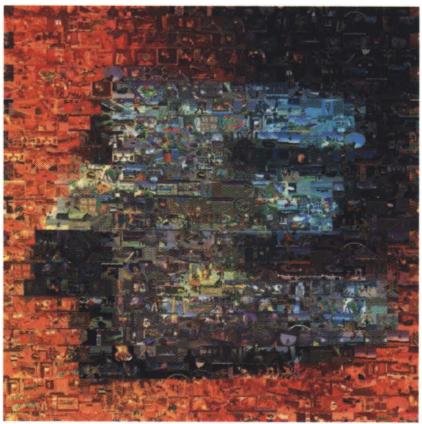
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